

Visualizing Dante's World:
Geography, History and Material Culture

Allison DeWitt

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2019

© 2019

Allison DeWitt

All rights reserved

ABSTRACT

Visualizing Dante's World: Geography, History and Material Culture

Allison DeWitt

This study examines the importance of geographical ideas in Dante's *Commedia* and develops a historically sensitive geocritical methodology to analyze the function of real world geography within Dante's poem. I aim to expand our understanding of the importance of the poet's use of geography beyond the consultation of geographical sources and consideration of place names. In the first chapter case studies of geographical references with connections to the Islamic world show how historicized approaches open up new possibilities of understanding the medieval significance of the poet's references. Subsequent chapters explore the relationship of the *Commedia*'s geography to medieval mapping technologies; comparing the parameters and borders of Dante's world to the genre of medieval *mappaemundi* as well as putting this worldview into conversation with the emerging field of portolan charts and the developing navigational technology of the thirteenth century. This project further expands our definition of the stakes of geographical knowledge and traces the the social, political and cultural implications of the various modes of representing the world and how these implications are evident in the scholarly responses to the worldview represented within the *Commedia*. Ultimately, this project shows how a geocritical historicized reading of the *Commedia* opens up new directions for Dante studies and puts the geographical material of Dante's work into conversation with other disciplines. The conclusion ends with a proposal for future digital directions for this research.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Dedication	vi
Chapter 1. Historicizing Dante’s Geography: How to Read the <i>Commedia</i> Geocritically	1
1.1 Readers of Dante’s Geography	5
1.2 Geocritical Approaches	14
1.3 Case Studies of the Islamic World	19
1.4 Looking Ahead	33
Chapter 2. Defining Dante’s World: The Margins and The Center	37
2.1 <i>Mappaemundi</i>	39
2.2 Boxing the Compass	47
2.3 The Center	51
2.4 The West	58
2.5 The East	69
Chapter 3. Charting Dante’s Mediterranean: Ulysses, Navigation, and <i>Portolani</i>	85
3.1 An Ancient Voyage Along the Trunk Routes of the Medieval Mediterranean	94
3.2 The Sociocultural Stakes of Geographical Knowledge	109
3.3 Trade, Crusade, and Material Culture	115
3.4 Trading the <i>Commedia</i> : Production and Circulation in the Mercantile Spheres	124
Chapter 4. Mapping Maometto: The Geographical Stakes of <i>Inferno</i> 28	129
4.1 Modern Approaches to Understanding Maometto	137
4.2 Historicizing Maometto	148
4.3 Earliest Commentaries	155
4.4 <i>Purgatorio</i> 32: Allegory of The Schism	164
Conclusion. (Re)reading Dante’s Geography and Digital Directions	175
5.1 Digitally Mapping Dante’s Geography	183
Appendix. “Or di’ a Fra Dolcin”: An Excursus on Dolcino di Novara	193
Bibliography	206

List of Figures

1. Close up of Arabia and the Red Sea	42
2. Zonal Map	43
3. Fra Mauro <i>Mappamundi</i>	45
4. Hereford World Map	48
4.1 detail of East	49
4.2 detail of West	49
4.3 detail of Jerusalem	49
5. Ebstorf Map	53
6. Pietro Vesconte <i>Planisphere</i>	64
6.1 Close up of line from Jerusalem to Sibilica in <i>Planisphere</i>	65
6.2 Close up of Sibilica in <i>Planisphere</i>	65
7. Map of Ulysses' journey	99
8. Close up of Sibilica and Septa in Vesconte <i>Portolan Chart</i>	102
9. Close up of relationship between Marsiglia and Buggea in Dalorto <i>Portolan</i>	111
10. Image of line connecting Damietta to Rome in Dalorto	112

Acknowledgments

While reflecting on the path that has led to the completion of this project it occurs to me that I should start by thanking my seventh grade geography teacher, Mr. Robert Woolner, who decided to teach us a unit on Dante's worldview and have us create a simple digital image of it. That day I went to the library to pick up a copy of the *Inferno* and have not put it down since. It seems especially fortuitous that the culmination of my research on Dante has led me back to a project which considers Dante's view of the world and hopes to use digital means to achieve its full realization. For giving me the foundation necessary to undertake this project I must thank all of my Dante teachers including John Freccero and Maria Luisa Ardizzone during my undergraduate study at NYU. Most especially I am grateful to my advisor Teodolinda Barolini who taught me what it means to be a Dante scholar and who has given me unwavering support and indispensable advice these past seven years.

I would also like to thank the rest of my committee members for the various ways in which they have contributed to my intellectual development and the realization of this project. Pier Mattia Tommasino has expanded my understanding of Mediterranean studies and introduced me to new ways of conceptualizing Muslim-Christian relations in Italian culture. Jo Ann Cavallo's work on representations of the world beyond Europe in Italian literature has inspired many aspects of this project and she has particularly supported my interest in digital mapping projects. Christopher Baswell first introduced me to archival work and medieval manuscripts and gave me many valuable skills which assisted my research during my travel fellowship years. Julie Van Peteghem has served as an excellent model of how one might turn a Dante

dissertation into an exciting Digital Humanities project and forge a successful career as a young Dante scholar.

This research was made possible by research fellowships from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and the Institute for Religion, Culture and Public Life as well as a travel grant from the Digital Humanities Autumn School at the Universität Trier. I would also like to thank the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences for the numerous opportunities which have been afforded to me over the course of my time at Columbia. I am particularly grateful for the efforts and expertise of Lani Muller and Aurelia Rabot-Hernandez in the Italian Department office, whose assistance has been invaluable up until the very end.

I am immensely grateful to my medievalist cohort Nassime, Matteo and Julianna for their solidarity and support from our first semester in the Dante seminar to our final semester teaching Literature Humanities together. I have learned so much from all of them over the years. Special thanks also to Alex Cuadrado and Andy Wyatt for reading through this dissertation in its final stages and offering very helpful feedback and suggestions for future directions.

In addition I need to thank the numerous babysitters who made it possible for me to meet deadlines, grab books from the library and maintain my sanity. A special thanks to my friend Alex Brinkman-Young who served as aunt, editor and host during my research trip to Oxford as well as my Aunt Rose who provided me with writing space in the final stretch and hosted my children on many occasions. Many thanks to my partner Rhammi for appreciating the importance of this project and never letting me give up. Finally, I have to thank my two daughters, Safia and Sabrina, for sharing me with Dante these past seven years. None of it would have been half as fun without their love, cuddles and earnest questions of “but what do you *really* do all day?”

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents who told me from a young age that they expected great things of me, and supported my interests and efforts in every way.

For my parents

*forse non pur per lor, ma per le mamme,
per li padri e per li altri che fuor cari*

Chapter 1.

Historicizing Dante's Geography: How to read the *Commedia* geocritically

L'aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci

Paradiso 22. 151

From the pits of *Malebolge* to the spheres of the Empyrean, Dante's imagery of the afterlife has pervaded popular culture from the fourteenth century to the present. His *Commedia* both replicated and then fundamentally changed the way in which Western culture conceptualized, represented and engaged with ideas about divine justice and its physical and spiritual manifestations. This dissertation does not deny the significance of Dante's metaphysical contributions, but rather turns our attention to another sphere of influence which might be considered more *mundane*, from the Latin root meaning "of or relating to the earth." The *Commedia* contains over 900 geographical references to more than 450 distinct locations around the world. These range from long geographical periphrases to city names buried in verbose metaphors. But in order to truly understand the scope and importance of Dante's geography, we cannot only pay attention to his explicit geographical references. My goal in this dissertation is to begin to consider the varied and important ways that Dante engages with ideas of space, place, borders and topography.

Despite the plethora of real-world geographical information contained within the poem, a quick summary of the literature on Dante's geography and cartography will uncover a

preoccupation with the terrain, details and configuration of the afterlife designed by the poet.¹ Modern editions of the *Commedia* may include maps of Dante's Italy to provide readers with some historical context but the majority of drawings and illustrations focus on the fictional realm of the poem rather than the real world to which the poet frequently refers. Although scholars have generally concentrated on understanding Dante's fictional world, his poem is highly engaged with "real-world" geographical ideas and these deserve substantially more attention. This dissertation explores Dante's relationship to geography and cartography and how an understanding of his relationship to these forms of knowledge can influence our reading of his poem and expand our understanding of its project. This consideration of Dante's geography goes beyond a list of place names and employs a historicized understanding of what Dante's references would have meant at his time and how his contemporaries understood geographical knowledge.²

Since it would be beyond the scope of this project to consider the more than 900 references within the *Commedia*, we will focus on Dante's representation of the world outside of Europe with particular attention on the Islamic world. While "Dante and Islam" has been a hotly debated topic for the past century,³ Dante's geography of the Islamic world has received less

¹ Such an interest is evident as early as the 16th century (for example Manetti's studies included in Landino's 1481 edition, Velutello's 1544 illustrations and Galileo's 1588 calculations). For some modern examples see Demaray (1987), Cachey (2001), and Ginsberg (2012). Even Cachey's 2015 essay on "Cosmology, Geography and Cartography" spends much more time on the cosmology of the afterlife than it does considering real world geography and its cartographical representations.

² This move to historicize is inspired by Barolini's 2009 essay "Only Historicize" which calls for scholars of Dante to consider the rich social and cultural concerns which are evident throughout Dante's writings. An early example of this form of historicizing is evident in her 2000 essay on Francesca da Rimini.

³ Benigni provides a succinct analysis of the centuries long European preoccupation with potential Arabic sources for Provençal and Sicilian poetic forms. The interest in Dante's relationship to Islamic texts came to a head with the 1919 contribution of Miguel Asín Palacios on *Dante y la eschatologia musulmana en la divina comedia*. Further attention will be given to the scholarly debate surrounding Dante's relationship to Islam in Chapter four, especially how it relates to the representation of Maometto in *Inferno* 28.

scholarly attention.⁴ The debate has generally focused on the possibility of Dante having had access to Arabic or Islamic sources in the composition of his poem. This project is not focused on the question of Dante's source materials, due to the fact that it is almost impossible to prove what he had access to beyond acknowledging those sources which were in circulation at his time in Italy.⁵ Instead, we will focus on how a geographically sensitive historicized reading can uncover his level of familiarity with the Islamic world and how this knowledge was circulating in his society. Each chapter engages with representations of Muslims and "others," as well as considering larger methodological analyses of how the poet describes that which is foreign and unfamiliar, including Ulysses's journey to the southern hemisphere and the poet's relationship to contemporary depictions of the far East. We will consider Dante's geography from both a literal, physical level—places that he refers to and maps which might have influenced him—and continue to an intellectual level which looks at the more abstract ways social and cultural knowledge of the world beyond Europe is implicated in geographical representations. Although these analytical tools are being applied to the Islamic world, this project aims to develop a

⁴ Schildgen's *Dante and the Orient* does consider the geography of the Orient as part of her larger consideration of the poet's relationship to the region, but she does not apply a geocritical mode of reading or consider all possible geographical references. Gabrieli's earlier *Dante e l'Oriente* also includes a section on geography, but as we will see later he manipulates the significance of this geography in service of his larger argument rather than considering the poet's engagement with the material.

⁵ While Palacios did not address the question of textual transmission in his work, various scholars who came after him have attempted to account for possible modes of transmission to prove Dante's relationship to Arabic sources. In 1949 Enrico Cerulli published *Il libro della scala e la questione delle fonti arabospagnole della Divina Commedia* in which he attempted to prove the possibility of Dante's knowledge of the legend of the Prophet Muhammad's night journey to heaven and therefore the possible influence of this source on his *Commedia*, although this contribution is not considered conclusive proof. Maria Corti (1990) proposed a threefold approach for discovering possible sources taking into account ideas which were in general circulation at the time, intertextual influences which could be based on second- or third-hand knowledge of a text and finally direct access to Arabic sources. Again, while her works propose some possible sources of influence none have been widely accepted as undisputed fact by the larger field of Dante scholarship.

geocritical methodology for reading the *Commedia* which can be applied universally and not just to references which fall within the analysis conducted herein.

The approach of this project is in dialogue with three separate scholarly traditions and engages with them each in different ways. This research is indebted to the work of previous scholars of Dante and Italian literature and culture who have considered the geographical sources and references of the *Commedia* and contributed to our understanding of how Dante related to the cartography of his day. In order to further our understanding of these references, this dissertation follows recent trends in the history of cartography and shows how scholarly approaches to Dante's geography have been informed by how historians of cartography engage with medieval geographical ideas. By incorporating the latest developments in our understanding of medieval cartography and views of the world, this project will uncover new aspects of Dante's geography and new ways of conceptualizing what can be considered geographically relevant in his work. The methodology used for this project is informed by the movement of geocriticism and scholarship on the intersection of geography and literature. In employing these theories, my research asserts that the relationship between literature and geography is not linear. Rather than merely trying to understand the sources of Dante's geography, we will see how Dante's text also serves as geographical source material and how this can help us conceptualize the relationship between literature and geography in new and interesting ways. Bertrand Westphal reminds us that "for the ancient Greeks, literature was so ingrained in the concrete forms of understanding the world that it did not exist independent of the sciences" (34). Bearing this observation in mind, we will explore the multiple and varied ways in which Dante's ideas and writings can be

said to interact centrally and importantly with geographical forms of knowledge, not as a peripheral concern.

Readers of Dante's Geography

Previous scholarship has recognized the importance of contextualizing Dante's geography through an explanation of medieval forms of mapping and has considered the specific maps which Dante might have known or which serve as representative examples of the types of maps with which he would have been familiar. The nineteenth century also saw a surge of interest in collecting, describing and even mapping the specific places to which Dante refers in his writings.⁶ Sir Edward Moore's 1903 essay on "The Geography of Dante" provided an understanding of the classical and medieval sources which would have given Dante his geographical ideas and continues to serve as an important resource for Dante's geography. The contributions of this generation were expanded upon by the following in new and interesting directions. Paolo Revelli's 1922 *L'Italia nella Divina Commedia* was the first to engage with specific maps and charts which could serve as representative examples of the types of sources to which the poet would have been exposed. Giuseppe Gabrieli's 1921 *Dante e l'Oriente* takes a similar approach as Moore and Revelli: he too contextualizes the sources the poet would have been consulting and addresses the locations he would have been aware of, in this case specifically for the "Orient." These contributions remain crucial resources for scholarship on the topic and provide the starting point for the study conducted in this dissertation. However, in

⁶ For specific place references see Alfred Basserman's *Dantes Spuren in Italien* (1899) translated as *Orme di Dante* by Egidio Gorra (1902). A similar project for educational purposes is *I luoghi d'Italia rammentati nella Divina commedia: raccolti e spiegati alla gioventù italiana* by Teresa Gambinossi Conte (1893). Mary Hensman created a *Dante Map* (1892) including a 51 page booklet sorting the place names between those in Italy and those outside of Italy.

relying on these sources we must also contextualize the ideas and assumptions underlying their engagement with geographical ideas and the ways in which they conceived of the importance of their approach to Dante's geography. In order to do this, we must look at developments in the history of cartography and how scholarly understandings of medieval geographical ideas have changed.

Moore's 1903 survey of Dante's geographical knowledge offers helpful explanations of the cartography of Dante's time and sheds light on many aspects of the geography of Dante's world. However, it is his mode of engagement with this world view that is most indicative of the prevailing opinion held of medieval geography and by extension Dante's use of it. Moore's disdain for medieval geography is evident throughout and he states early on: "A writer cannot be blamed if, being fully abreast of the knowledge available in his day, he does not rise beyond it, especially in a subject on which he has bestowed no special study, and wherein he has had no opportunities of personal investigation" (109). Moore does his best to explain away the aspects of Dante's world which are most confusing to the modern reader, emphasizing the "primitive" nature of medieval cartographic approaches as well as the flawed medieval tendency to prioritize classical sources over scientific reason. In order to account for some of the more baffling medieval ideas in Dante's geography, Moore informs us that "even the author of the celebrated Hereford Map" (which Moore had previously referred to as "grotesque") "copies blunders of Orosius about the British Isles, when the means of correction were both ready to hand and patent to any person of average intelligence" (142).⁷ This comment serves to emphasize both that Dante

⁷ Moore also ascribes a similar geographical laziness to the work of Dante's teacher Brunetto Latini, whose *Tresor* contains a section on geography entitled *Mappa Mundi*: "B. Latini, for example, often copies the statements of Solinus even on points where they might have been corrected by the most easily accessible knowledge" (143).

should not be held to the standard of a mapmaker, since his primary concern was not geographical, but also that if mapmakers can make such obvious errors Dante should certainly be forgiven for any minor blunders. Moore also insists that “Dante’s great poem, at any rate, would not have been the place for advancing the newest lights on geographical science, even if its author were acquainted with them” (143).

As we will see throughout this chapter and those which follow, Dante’s great poem is actually quite well acquainted with the latest ideas of medieval geography and is explicitly and implicitly involved in advancing them.

This early twentieth century scholarly disdain for medieval mapping technology was not limited to *dantisti*, but was certainly inherited from early historians of cartography. The first great scholar of medieval mapping also felt the need to justify his study of premodern cartography and acknowledge its lack of scientific rigor. Very early in his groundbreaking *The Dawn of Modern Geography* (1897) Raymond Beazley offers an apology for his subject matter:

When any one tries to gain a hearing for a subject which is obscure, apparently uninteresting, and possibly despised, he is bound to show cause for his intrusion. And the reason why the travels and geographical science of the later Empire and the darker Middle Ages are important to history cannot easily be found in the evidence we actually possess of those travels and that science. (8)

Just as Moore had tried to explain away medieval geographical flaws which seemed apparent to a modern reader, so too does Beazley consider his subject matter flawed from a modern perspective. Contemporary scholarship on the history of cartography rejects this anachronistic approach to medieval geography and has subsequently been able to appreciate the contributions of the genre rather than remaining blinded by their inaccuracies. Similarly, by considering Dante’s geography not from the perspective of place names and classical sources, but rather

holistically, with an awareness of the work being done by his contemporaries, we can appreciate Dante's contributions on their own terms and not feel obliged to apologize when his geography does not follow modern standards.

In order to engage with medieval maps without contemporary expectations coloring our perceptions, we need to analyze the functions these maps served as artifacts of not only cartographical knowledge, but also theological, historical and cultural significance. While Moore considered the Hereford map grotesque, contemporary scholarship sees the so-called "errors" in a different light and argues that the didactic purpose of medieval world maps was not topographical accuracy, but rather the presentation in one image of the entirety of current ideas about the earth, the cosmos, and important people and events in human society.⁸ For this reason a medieval mapmaker would have privileged the reproduction of classical ideas of the world over "fixing" a coastline based merely on the experience of walking along the shore. Similarly we cannot treat medieval maps as a monolith which can be defined by similar parameters and with similar criteria. Morse reminds us that we must also approach the medieval maps we study as "tools for thinking and as a flexible means of communicating ideas" (26). By looking at medieval geographical materials as sources in conversation with each other, we avoid overlooking their individual nuance and significance. This also opens up our interpretation of what we consider geographical source material and how we privilege the contributions of one source over another. When we consider medieval world maps as representations of an entire

⁸ This philosophy was described by Hugh of Saint Victor in 1126: "We must collect a brief summary of all things...which the mind may grasp and the memory retain with ease. The mind chiefly esteems events by three things: the persons by whom deeds were done, the places in which they were done, and the times when they were done." (cited in Woodward, 290).

cosmography, including historical figures and important events, we can see a much closer correlation between the work of the Hereford mapmaker and the author of the *Commedia*.⁹

This correlation is not so surprising, given the relationship between text and image in the *mappaemundi* tradition. Unlike contemporary ideas of space, which privilege images, coordinates and measurements, in the Middle Ages the drawn portion of the map was only considered one component of representing a world view. In fact, mapmaker and Minorite Friar Paolino Veneto actually argued for the necessity of a “twofold map”:

because painting without writing indicates regions or nations unclearly, (and) writing without the aid of painting truly does not mark the boundaries of the provinces of a region in their various parts sufficiently (clearly) for them to be described almost at a glance.¹⁰

Although Fra Paolino is convinced of the utility of images in presenting provinces and regions, there is no evidence to suggest that medieval geographical thinkers considered images to be a necessary component of *mappaemundi*, and a number of the most widely used sources of geographical knowledge were purely text.¹¹ David Woodward highlights the fact that making a *mappaemundi* was not a specialized task and we can often identify the same handwriting on texts and images, suggesting that they did not consider mapmaking to require any kind of specialized

⁹ It has frequently been claimed Dante’s geographical project is a type of *mappaemundi*. For examples see Demaray (1974), Hawkins (1999), Schildgen (2002), Scafi (2006). The relationship between the poem and the genre of *mappaemundi* will be discussed further in chapter two.

¹⁰ Vat. Lat. 1960, fol. 13, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. The translation is from Schulz, 452.

¹¹ For instance, the ideas of Orosius influenced an entire genealogy of medieval worldviews, but there is no evidence that the original text contained any drawn maps or diagrams.

knowledge.¹² He also reminds us that the precedence of text over image was considered a biblical prescription and did not just pertain to representations of the physical world (286).¹³

In considering how Dante would have interacted with the ideas of space that were circulating at his time, we can think about the ways in which his poem also participates in a similar function as contemporary geographical texts. Although Dante does not set out to write on geography or to explicitly define his cartographical world view, his construction of the afterlife has such a strong relationship with the physical world that he is required to expound upon the parameters of the earth. In order to indicate the positions of hell and purgatory as well as the passage of time during the journey, Dante situates his pilgrim in relation to places in the known world. His astronomical periphrases, while often referring to stars and the sun, are also connected to the edges of his world as well as to significant locations within it. As we will see in the second chapter, the poet's prioritization of metaphorically significant axes can lead to inaccurate continent sizes and relationships between places.

Beyond the fact that Dante's choices can help us better understand how he saw and related to the physical world, his text has now served as a source of medieval geographical knowledge to a greater and lesser extent for more than six centuries. In *The History of Cartography* Dante's representation of a spherical earth is actually cited as proof of the

¹² This is not the case for the navigational charts which began to be produced in great numbers at the turn of the fourteenth century. Pietro Vesconte, one of the most famous chartmakers of the early period, is considered one of the first professional cartographers in Europe. Unlike the producers of the *mappaemundi* who did not require specialized geographical knowledge, Vesconte only produced charts, maps and city plans.

¹³ He also highlights the fact that the term *mappamundi* was used to denote any kind of depiction of the world; these could be the views of the world we usually associate with the term, a navigational chart (not commonly defined as a *mappamundi* by modern standards) or even just "a verbal description in a metaphorical sense" (287).

widespread medieval belief in this concept. It is not just his description of the earth as a sphere that is highlighted, but the fact that “he, apparently felt not the slightest need to justify his view” (Woodward, 321). Dante’s references to the Muslim world are cited alongside medieval maps and archival sources in Youssef Kamal’s *Monumenta cartographica Africae et Aegypti*, a collection of geographical references to Africa over the centuries. Kamal’s eclectic choice of source material serves as an important model for our approach to considering Dante’s literary geography alongside cartographic representations. In conducting a geocritical reading of Dante’s writings it is important not only to understand his sources and how he obtained geographical information, but also the ways in which his text serves as a source of geographical information for his contemporaries and his later readers. As we will see throughout the following chapters, we can learn just as much about medieval geography by how Dante engages with it as we can learn about his poem through an understanding of that same geography. The geographical choices which Dante makes as a poet are just as significant as those made by medieval makers of *mappaemundi* and navigational charts. When the poet chooses to defy conventional knowledge or aligns his worldview with one specific tradition we must understand how these choices go on to be understood and read as geographical contributions.

It is not only the genre of *mappaemundi* which we must understand in order to have a full historical appreciation of the cartographical milieu in which the poet was writing. At the end of the fourteenth century the medieval Mediterranean saw a boom in the production of quite accurate and specific navigational charts, often referred to as *portolani* or portolan charts. Just as Beazley and his contemporaries derided the absurdities of the *mappaemundi*, they hailed the arrival of the *portolani* as the return of classical reason and the appearance of modern scientific

methods.¹⁴ Contemporary scholarship pushes back against this celebration of the modernity of portolan charts over the ignorance of *mappaemundi* and instead finds evidence that both forms of mapping coexisted for at least two centuries. Rather than seeing navigational charts as an improvement over *mappaemundi*, medieval users considered both forms of mapping equally relevant for different purposes and in different spheres of society. Over the centuries following the appearance of the navigational charts, we see examples of *mappaemundi* which incorporate the navigational accuracy of the portolan charts and some later charts which include the decorative and descriptive features of the *mappaemundi* tradition.

Revelli's *L'Italia di Dante* was the first to propose Dante's specific knowledge of navigational charts, a topic we will explore further in chapter three. Being a geographer and historian of early Atlantic exploration, Revelli saw in Dante's geography specific references which showed his awareness of the latest innovations in mapping at his time. This assertion is important for beginning to deconstruct some of the weight of Moore's contention that Dante's use of geography shows very little particular interest or specialized knowledge. Revelli uses his proof of Dante's awareness of these charts to emphasize that the poet was certainly highly knowledgeable of the most up-to-date cartography.¹⁵ Not only do Revelli's findings establish Dante as geographically informed, but they also suggest that knowledge of navigational charts was so widespread that to lack it would indicate ignorance.

¹⁴ We can see this attitude in Beazley: "the absurdities of dark-age mapmaking are the precursors of the first accurate charts and of modern atlases; the creeping ventures of the pilgrims are the first movements of an ultimately invincible race-expansion" (18). He only assigns value to the *mappaemundi* tradition in so far as it led to later more accurate and modern maps.

¹⁵ Revelli insists that there is no question that Dante would have been aware of the portolan charts circulating at his time, given their high degree of diffusion across different spheres of society: "Dei portolani del suo tempo Dante ebbe indubbiamente notizia, tanto eran diffusi, tanto eran noti a mercanti e pellegrini" (21).

In recent decades, scholars of the history of cartography have begun to deconstruct the nineteenth and early twentieth century prejudices about the supposed inaccuracy of medieval maps. The contributions of Campbell, Woodward, and Harvey to *The History of Cartography* played an important role in changing how we approach medieval ideas of space. Scholars no longer maintain that portolan charts were the triumph of reason over the “absurdities” of medieval mapmaking and the study of *mappaemundi* understands this genre as a very particular way of viewing the world with its own complicated conventions. Woodward has shown that the traditional *mappaemundi* can be better appreciated when we consider the purposes for which they were designed rather than follow modern notions of the functions maps should serve (284). Even when mapmakers had access to the cartographical techniques used to create navigational charts, we still find many examples which incorporate the didactic features of the *mappaemundi* genre. Campbell identifies the existence of a subset of portolan charts which incorporate the general chart outlines, but rarely have a scale sufficient for navigational purposes, indicating that they were a hybrid genre meant to be studied and consulted similar to the less accurate world maps, but incorporating some of the highly specific navigational knowledge of the Mediterranean region (379).

Campbell also wrote the preface for a groundbreaking study on portolan charts written by Catalan scholar Puchades i Bataller. In his preface Campbell explains that Puchades employs his skills as a medievalist to situate portolan charts historically, rather than just study the charts themselves as has been the standard focus of the field (410). Through the introduction of this historical background Puchades is able to account for the cultural significance of these new forms of cartographical knowledge. Puchades identifies one of his main aims as:

“contextualising the spread of nautical cartography from the perspective of the development of maritime trade and the spread of writing as a vehicle of social organization” (411). We will see how Puchades’ contributions can help us shed light on the role of cartography in Dante’s poem in chapter three. However, this approach also serves as a model for how we should conduct the study of literary geography. Rather than merely using historical sources to explain the references and context of the literary text, we must situate the text and its geography within the same society and explore the significance of the overlaps and relationships between these spheres.

Geocritical Approaches

It is not only Puchades who identifies the importance of understanding cartographical knowledge alongside other forms of cultural production. While neither the genre of Dante studies nor the history of cartography has fully embraced this new mode of engagement with their materials, there is a larger movement of scholars of literary geography or geocriticism who advocate for an approach which studies geographical information across all the genres in which it is represented. Edward Soja argues:

Space was too important to be left only to the specialized spatial disciplines (Geography, Architecture, Urban Studies) or merely added on as a gap-filler or factual background for historians, social scientists, or Marxist sociologists. The spatiality of human life, like its historicity or sociality, infused every discipline and discourse.¹⁶

Soja makes a crucial point that the study of the importance of spatial knowledge should not be limited to only the disciplines traditionally associated with it. However, up to this point traditional scholarship on cartography has not embraced the contributions which can be made by scholars of literature and culture beyond a very minimal amount. Puchades argues that while

¹⁶ *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places* (1996) Cited in Westphal, 31.

literary sources may be consulted by historians of cartography, they have not been treated with the degree of seriousness that they merit and that without the correct level of expertise they may not be utilized appropriately.¹⁷

Although this call has not been taken up completely by the historians, a number of literary scholars have offered interventions into the field. Bertrand Westphal's *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* is deeply engaged with the question of how to study the geography and spatiality which exists within literature and how to bring that study into conversation with other disciplines. Rather than merely study the geography of the text in order to help us better understand that text, Westphal proposes a complete reimagination of how we consider the concept of space and how literature relates to that consideration. He argues that literature should not be studied for its relationship to geography merely because some texts contain geographical references, but because as a genre it can fundamentally change how we look at space in new and productive ways. He reminds us that "literature is a vector of assumed instability in a series of disciplinary landscapes traditionally characterized by stability and saturation...complemented by theory, it is able to propose solutions, to project representational models applicable to shifting contexts" (35). This assertion that literature can be seen as more than just a source of place names and geographical references is particularly relevant to Dante studies. The text of the *Commedia* is not just geographically interesting due to the significant number of references, but

¹⁷ Puchades cautions: "recourse to medieval literary or documentary sources is not without its dangers for the researcher. If we use the information they provide without knowing them well, and without reflecting on the problems that, depending on the different nature of each class of source, they may pose, we may become victims of the distortions caused by snippets of data that constitute only a tiny portion of the past" (425).

rather because of the poet's patent interest in representing and exploring geographical ideas through his poetic choices.

Another voice in the field of literary geography, and English translator of Westphal, is Robert Tally, Jr. Although not a scholar of the *Commedia*, Tally has argued for the importance of studying specifically Dante's geography within the framework of geocriticism. He argues that Virgil's explanation of the cartography of hell in canto 11 of *Inferno* serves to illustrate the way in which "the physicality of the moral geography is itself a sign of the merger of theory and practice in Dante's literary cartography."¹⁸ Although all literary texts are in some way geographically significant, Dante's text should be even more interesting to scholars of literary geography due to the poet's complex engagement with cartographical ideas; both the cartography of his age and more broadly the idea of what cartography can be and how it can be used in literature. Similarly, the cartography and geography of the *Commedia* should be of interest to Dante scholars for more than just their possibility to shed light on historical and cultural details of the poem. By being attuned to the geographical complexity of Dante's thought we can open up new ways of conceiving of his entire philosophical and poetic project.

One scholar who has taken up the cartographic potential of Dante's writings is Theodore Cachey, Jr.. His writings have mostly focused on the poet's mapping of Italy and the Mediterranean and he argued in 2014: "it would be fair to say that Dante's cartography of Italy offers us one of the most important and most detailed representations of the peninsula to survive

¹⁸ See Tally, 2015 (566). Tally has elsewhere (2013) cited Auerbach's "astonishing claim that, despite being an author of the "divine" *Commedia*, Dante was the "poet of the earthly world." While neither of these statements may not seem groundbreaking to Dante scholars, it is important to note that it is literary scholars who are not specialists on the *Commedia* who have been most attuned to its geocritical possibilities.

from the period” (208). This is certainly important as it recognizes the geographical contributions made by the poem which can serve as important source material to scholars of the medieval Mediterranean and the history of cartography. While Cachey has focused primarily on the map of Italy in the writings of Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch, my research is focused on representations of the world outside of Europe, although always with an awareness of how these descriptions of foreign places can shed light on cultural and social preoccupations within Dante’s Italy.

Cachey also goes beyond just looking at the geography of Italy and suggests that “Dante’s cartographic *descriptio* of the earth might be considered one of the pillars of the poet’s rhetorical program in support of the truth claims of the poem” (203).¹⁹ Such a view of the poet’s geography takes us beyond the level of names and places and brings us to the realm of understanding the theoretical role of geography within the text. Much previous Dante scholarship has focused on identifying places named by the poet and then used this naming in order to make claims about his worldview. Projects like Mary Hensman’s *Dante Map* (1892) and Gabrieli’s *Dante e l’Oriente* (1921) stopped at the level of identifying place names. More recently a digital humanities project by Andrea Gazzoni entitled *Mapping Dante* has published a digital map of the places named in the *Commedia*.²⁰ While these lists and maps do have some importance in identifying geographical markers in the text, there is a limit to how much we can glean from an awareness of how many places are named and the ways in which that naming takes place.

This is the approach proposed by the theorist of distant reading, Franco Moretti:

¹⁹ The relationship between the poet’s geographical project and the truth claims of the poem is considered further in the following chapters two and three.

²⁰ <https://www.mappingdante.com>

You choose a unit...find its occurrences, place them in a space...or in other words: you reduce the text to a few elements, and abstract them from the narrative flow, and construct a new, artificial object...And with a little luck, these maps will be more than the sum of their parts: they will possess “emerging” qualities, which were not visible at the lower level. (53)

Moretti recognizes that his proposed approach does not actually create geographical maps but rather diagrams (54). Ultimately this does not offer a strong enough approach to a text as geographically, culturally and socially rich as the *Commedia*. This surface level consideration of Dante’s geography has been the status quo in Dante studies for too long, and therefore this project focuses on understanding the workings of geography within the text and how geographical knowledge and literary production are related within medieval European cultural production or within literature as a whole.

Ultimately this dissertation aims to build upon the existing scholarship on Dante’s relationship to geography and cartography, but also to integrate the latest understanding of medieval cartography and contemporary theories of the relationships between literature and geography. This research contributes to our understanding of Dante’s literary project as well as to our understanding of the society in which he was composing his poem, and it also aims to contribute to the history of cartography and theoretical approaches to literary geographies. When we provide a fully historicized background for the cartographical milieu in which the poet was writing, along with the significance of specific references, we can better understand the role of individual places and ideas within his poem and how they relate to other references within his texts or those of his contemporaries. At the same time, this historicized data can contribute to how we understand the history of cartography, Italy and the Mediterranean region by recognizing Dante’s text as an interlocutor within a larger conversation on geographical ideas at the time.

This project also aims to develop a large scale view of the broader role of geography within Dante's *Commedia* in order to illustrate how each geographical reference or larger geographical choice can be seen to contribute to his literary and cultural aims. Once the relevance of geography within Dante's poem has been elucidated, the theory behind this understanding can contribute to the broader conversation on the relationship between literature and geography and can be used to support geocritical readings of other medieval Italian literary texts and beyond.

Case Studies of the Islamic World

In order to demonstrate the way this multifaceted approach can be applied on a small scale we will look at examples of references within the *Commedia* which can be historicized in order to clarify how the reference might have been understood by contemporary readers, and thereby how the reference is situated within the larger geographical environment in which the poem was written. By identifying the geographical specificity and historical background of these references, and how they can then be related to other moments in the poem, we will also be able to expand our understanding of a particular facet of Dante's larger worldview. Given that the case study for expounding this geocritical methodology is Dante's view of the Islamic world, these references are those which are either directly or indirectly connected to his representation of those regions. However, the methodology employed will allow us to reflect on how literary references and geographical knowledge are thoroughly interrelated and can be applied in other cases in future research.

The significant number of real world references contained within the *Commedia* has already been emphasized, as well as the close relationship between Dante's use of geography and the way in which his contemporaries represented the world through *mappaemundi*, navigational

charts and other geographical works. It is certainly important to have an understanding of how the poem's macroscopic worldview relates to contemporary medieval images of the world and this topic will be explored further in chapter two. We will also see the significance of geographical ideas for shaping cultural understandings and how these ideas can influence various aspects of society in chapters three and four. However, here we will consider more closely how individual references within the text can benefit from a historicized reading. When we historicize a specific geographical reference this gives us a greater insight into how the poet is using this place name or description to enrich the larger significance of the episode. Such a method of analysis can be used to demonstrate a geographical mode of reading which goes beyond simple place names in order to approximate the medieval understanding of the place and its importance in the poem.

In order to illustrate the utility of such a mode of reading, we will consider some of the failures of the standard geographical markers used by critics and explore new ways of uncovering important cultural and geographical information. Dante's City of Dis is most frequently of interest to scholars studying his representation of Islam because of its infamous reference to red mosques glowing among the tombs where the heretics are burned:

Ed io "Maestro, già *le sue meschite*
là entro certe ne le valle cerno
vermiglie come se di foco uscite
fossero"

I said: "I can already see distinctly—
master—the *mosques* that gleam within the valley
as crimson as if they had just been drawn
out of the fire."²¹

Inf. 8.70-73

Of course it is notable that, despite this reference to mosques in the distance, the poet does not highlight the inclusion of any Muslims, barbarians or non-Europeans among his heretics. The

²¹ All translations from Mandelbaum unless otherwise noted.

two main characters of *Inferno* 10, Farinata and Cavalcante, are decidedly Florentine. At the beginning of *Inferno* 11 the poet alerts us of the presence of Pope Anastasius, punished for his supposed acceptance of the heresy of Acacius, which denied the divinity of Christ.²²

Therefore, on the surface, it appears that this canto gives us very little material for expanding our knowledge of Dante's ideas about Muslim-Christian relations. However, if we look more closely we will find a reference which gives us much more information than the generic description of mosques. This reference occurs in the simile which the poet uses to compare the tombs of the heretics with two famous Mediterranean cemeteries:

Sì come ad Arli, over Rodano stagna, sì com' a Pola, presso del Carnaro ch'Italia chiude e suoi termini bagna,	Just as at Arles, where Rhone becomes a marsh, just as at Pola, near Quarnero's gulf that closes Italy and bathes its borders,
fanno i sepulcri tutt' il loco varo, così facevan quivi d'ogne parte,	the sepulchers make all the plain uneven, so did they here on every side

Inf. 9.112-116

At first it appears that the poet has just chosen two relatively well-known cemeteries in order to elicit the appropriate image in his reader's mind. This is certainly an example of how the poet's use of real world references in the composition of his metaphors serves to bolster the truth claim being made about his fictional afterlife. The comparison of the tombs of Arles and Pola to the city of Dis uses the real reference to distract the reader from the fiction being created. It also creates a sense of familiarity, making the realm of the afterlife seem less strange and foreign.

²² Most commentators note a confusion behind Dante's inclusion of Anastasius among the heretics. Singleton explains: "A certain tradition seems to have confused Anastasius II, pope from 496 to 498, and his namesake and contemporary Anastasius I, emperor from 491 to 518. Emperor Anastasius is said to have been led by Photinus, a deacon of Thessalonica (not to be confused with the better-known Photinus, bishop of Sirmium), into the heresy of Acacius, patriarch of Constantinople (d. 488). Acacius denied the divine origin of Christ, holding that He was naturally begotten and conceived in the same way as the rest of mankind. Dante was following the accepted medieval tradition concerning Pope Anastasius' heretical persuasion."

From a cartographical perspective these references might be noted as an important part of Dante's Mediterranean world. Cachey (2010) has argued that Pola and Arles mark the north-east and north-west boundaries of Italy, respectively (329). This serves to support his argument that Dante is methodically drawing a map of Italy through his references over the course of *Inferno*.²³ Scholars interested in Dante's depictions of France might highlight the reference to Arles and those focused on the Eastern borders of Italy would be intrigued by Pola.²⁴ However, our mode of geocritically reading the *Commedia* goes beyond the surface level identification of places on a map and the assumptions which can be made about those references based solely on their geographical location. By looking further into how his contemporary readers understand Dante's choices we can gain an appreciation of their significance beyond their coordinates and thereby comprehend the full extent of their geographical importance.

In the early commentaries to this verse, a number of commentators include an interesting folk tale about the cemetery at Arles which highlights its importance as more than just a famous place in France. In Boccaccio's *Esposizioni* he describes the tale as relating the results of a battle between William of Orange and "barbarous infidels" from Africa. Although the Christians won the battle, they were plagued with the difficulty of burying their dead. According to the legend, the night after the battle tombs miraculously appeared over the plain and the following morning

²³ He writes: "the evocation of the boundaries of Italy at the gates of Dis is part of a system of cartographic correspondences that emerges progressively in subsequent similes"; see Cachey (2010), 331.

²⁴ In fact, the latter portion of this quotation is carved into the wall of the Venetian arsenale under a bust of Dante. The inscription reads: "Questa immagine di Dante sottratta alle offese nemiche qui ancora attestati oltre l'avverso destino l'indomita fede della gente istriana nel proprio diritto come un dì a Pola presso del Carnaro ch'Italia chiude e suoi termini bagna".

all of the Christians who died were buried in them.²⁵ Boccaccio goes on to say that he doesn't really believe the fantastical aspect of this legend, but that it is possible that the battle and subsequent burial of Christian soldiers in the cemetery is accurate. *L'Ottimo commento* provides an even more detailed and relevant explanation, clarifying that after the battle the surviving Christians did not know how to distinguish the bodies of their dead from those of the infidels ("conoscerli da li infideli").²⁶ They prayed to God and, miraculously, above each corpse there appeared a plaque on which was written the name and condition of the fallen. Based on these they were able to bury each Christian soldier on the basis of his condition in life.²⁷

The *Ottimo's* version particularly shows the relevance of the cemetery of Arles for an understanding of this canto. After describing the way in which the tombs covered the plain of Dis on every side, the poet goes on to describe how they are filled with flames in which the heretics are punished for eternity. Virgil clarifies for the pilgrim the specificity of the punishment: "simile qui con simile è sepolto / e i monimenti son più e men caldi" (Here like has been ensepulchered with like; some monuments are heated more, some less [*Inf.* 9.130-131]). Just as the heretics are punished according to their level and condition, and sorted "like with like", so too do we learn

²⁵ "Di queste dicono i paesani una lor favola, affermando in quel luogo essere già stata una gran battaglia tra Guiglielmo d'Oringa e sua gente d'una parte,... e barbari infedeli venuti d'Africa, ed essere stati uccisi molti cristiani in essa, e che poi la notte seguente, per divino miracolo, essere state quivi quelle arche recate per sepoltura de' cristiani, e così la mattina vegnente tutti i cristiani morti essere stati sepelliti in esse." This, and all commentaries, consulted on *Dartmouth Dante Lab*.

²⁶ This comment in itself gives us a fascinating insight into how medieval Christians saw themselves in relation to their Muslim enemies. Despite the obvious antagonism which resulted in a battle, the difficulty of distinguishing between the dead bodies suggests a level of physical similarity perhaps even to the level of dress.

²⁷ *L'Ottimo* explains: "Li rimasi christiani volendo per pietade sopelire li loro morti e conoscerli da li infideli, pregaro Idio che a lloro dovesse per grazia revellare quali fossero li fedeli; exauditi da Dio apparve sopra ciascuno corpo di christiano una cedola nella quale era scripto il nome di colui et la conditione sua. Costoro veduto questo fecioro fare arche a ciascuno secondo la sua conditione, a chi basse, a chi alte, piccoli et grandi."

that the legend of the cemetery of Arles insists on the importance of burying martyred Christian soldiers according to their level and condition in life. The only difference is that the inhabitants of the tombs are reversed. At Arles we have martyred Christians while in Dis they contain heretics. As discussed, the reference to “meschite” or mosques as glowing red within the city of Dis (*Inf.* 8.70) could serve to suggest the presence of Muslims among the heretics being punished, making even more explicit the reversal of the legend at Arles. After the battle it is the victorious Christians who are buried, whereas in Dante’s afterlife it is defeated heretics who are punished in tombs.

Once we understand that the reference to Arles is significant for more than just the fact that it is a real place, we can look further at the contemporary relevance of the reference beyond its location. A modern reader would probably make no connection between Dante’s city of Dis, the cemetery of Arles and medieval views of Muslim-Christian relations. Scholars interested in understanding how Dante and his contemporaries engaged with ideas about Islam often look at his references to places in the Islamic world or famous Muslim figures that he mentions. Similarly, historians of cartography interested in how many of Dante’s references engage with the Islamic world would never stumble upon his reference to Arles as bearing any significance in this conversation. However, we can see through his early commentators’ immediate connection of the legend to the imagery of *Inferno* that it was significant to their understanding of his choices as well as their knowledge of the historical relevance of the cemetery itself. When we consider how perfectly the imagery of religious discord and burial based on level matches up with the fictional creation being compared, we cannot deny that this contemporary story serves

as an important intertext for understanding not only this metaphor but also how geographical metaphors function within the poem.

Beyond the level of the individual reference, this methodology can also be expanded to inform a reading of the poet's metaphors and references with a greater attention to contemporary information beyond the purely cartographical, surface-level significance. Once we have identified this mode of reading Dante's geographical references we become more attuned to moments of possibility for new readings and new approaches to his overall project. Moving deeper into hell, we will now consider another circle which has become infamous for its anti-Islamic depiction of Maometto and Ali, *Inferno* 28, the specifics of which will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four. Before introducing Maometto as the first of the schismatics, the poet prepares his reader for the horrors which he is about to describe by declaring that they are worse than the carnage seen in a number of gory Apulian battles. In verses 7 to 21 he describes five battles which took place at different times in history, but all somewhere in the general region of Puglia, and explains that even if all the dead and wounded of these battles were collected together "d'aequar sarebbe nulla / il modo de la nona bolgia sozzo" (that would not match the hideousness of the ninth abyss [*Inf.* 28.20-21]).

When we scan the beginning of the canto for geographical references we encounter "Puglia" (*Inf.* 28.9), "Ceperan" (*Inf.* 28.16) and "Tagliacozzo" (*Inf.* 28.17). After the first reference to Puglia, Dante refers to three battles: when the Trojans first fought to establish themselves in Italy, the second Punic war against Carthage and the wars of "Robert Guiscard." In her commentary on the verse Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi tells us that Guiscard was made Duke of Puglia in 1059 and that he fought a number of bloody wars against Saracens, other

Norman counts and surrounding cities.²⁸ His battles against Saracens were not lost on Dante, who included him amongst the defenders of the faith in *Paradiso* 18. In any other context this may seem like a piece of inconsequential trivia. However, as part of the introduction which leads up to the dramatic revelation of the punishment of the Prophet of Islam, it takes on a different valence, but one which would not be discovered through a standard geographical mapping of the references contained within the canto. Similarly, a reading of this canto for explicit references to the Islamic world would only discover the figures of Maometto and Ali and would miss the rich historical and multicultural tapestry which accompanies Dante's poetic periphrasis. Through an attention to the historical details surrounding Dante's geographical references, we see that the borders dividing Islamic and Christian worlds were more porous than medieval scholarship might suppose and that even a reference to battles in southern Italy has resonance for our understanding of Christian-Muslim relations.

Another example of a hidden and seemingly inconsequential reference to the Islamic world can be found in *Paradiso* 16 as the pilgrim converses with his crusading ancestor, Cacciaguida. We learn that Cacciaguida blames the current state of Florentine society on the "confusion de le persone" (mingling of the populations [*Par.* 16.67]) which resulted from the influx of people from the countryside moving to Florence. He asserts that this mingling was the principal cause of the "mal de la cittade" (evil in the city [*Par.* 16.68]) and this reflection on the evil befalling Florence leads him to reference other cities which have already disappeared or are close to destruction:

²⁸ She writes: "fatto duca di Puglia (1059) con investitura del papa Niccolò II, si conquistò il territorio in sanguinose guerre, durate un ventennio, contro i Saraceni, gli altri conti normanni, le città di Bari e di Amalfi, e i Ducati di Benevento e di Salerno, caduti per sua mano nel 1077."

Se tu riguardi Luni e Orbisaglia,
come sono ite, e come se ne vanno
di retro ad esse Chiusi e Sinigaglia

Consider Luni, Urbisaglia, how
they went to ruin (Sinigaglia follows,
and Chiusi, too, will soon have vanished)

Par. 16.73-75

Reflecting on the disappearances, past or impending, of these four cities leads the speech to a discussion of the fleeting nature of all human constructs: “Le vostre cose tutte hanno lor morte, / sì come voi” (All things that you possess, possess their death, just as you do [*Par. 16.79-80*]).

The importance of this line will become evident over the course of the rest of the canto as Cacciaguida recites for his great-great grandson the names of illustrious Florentines of his earlier generation whose legacies are now lost to history. However, we will focus more closely on the significance of the four cities that Dante chose for his exemplars in introducing this topic.

Chiavacci Leonardi explains the importance of the pairings, as each consists of one Etruscan and one Roman city, significant because they were the two largest populations of central Italy.²⁹

There is also similarity in their destructions; Luni and Urbisaglia were both destroyed by invaders, while Chiusi and Sinigaglia were both eventually abandoned for their malarial and unhealthy climates.³⁰

However, it is important to note that, by contrast, the falls of Luni and Sinigaglia were both tied up with Saracen attacks of the two cities.³¹ Further research reveals that the city of Luni was captured by the forces of Mujahid al-Amiri of Denia in 1016, as a beachhead from

²⁹ She describes them as: “una città etrusca e una romana (che rappresentano quindi i due grandi popoli dell’Italia centrale antica)”.

³⁰ The identification of the Valdichiana region, where Chiusi is located, as malarial and unhealthy is also present in *Inf.* 29.46-47 with the reference to “li spedali / di Valdichiana tra ‘l luglio e ‘l settembre” (the hospitals of Valdichiana between July and September) not containing as many sick, festering people as the bolgia of the falsifiers.

³¹ See commentaries of Chiavacci Leonardi and Singleton for these explanations of the cities’ falls.

which his forces could attack Sardinia.³² He was eventually defeated by the Pisans and the Genoese with the support of Pope Benedict III, but not before the city was destroyed. Sinigaglia is referenced by Dante as a city which would soon fall. This city in the region of Le Marche was under Guelph control, and was sacked in 1264 by Saracen mercenaries under the orders of Manfred and was almost completely destroyed before it was eventually abandoned due to health reasons.³³

This connection between two of the four cities named by Cacciaguida to warfare with Saracens is certainly relevant in the heaven of Mars where Dante celebrates the martial efforts of his crusading ancestor. This is another moment which serves to remind us that the important geographical information behind a reference is not always contained in its location on a map or the explicit reason the poet gives for mobilizing said reference. By incorporating a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural significance underlying this geography we are contributing to our overall understanding of Dante's view of the Islamic world and the way in which his society conceptualized their relationship to Muslims. Just as the simile of Arles showed us that references which indicate a relationship to the Islamic world are not only those geographically located there, this example shows us that even within Italian geographical

³² "In 1016 during the attack against Sardinia, a group of Muslims from Spain guided by the ruler Mujahîd, made a diversion to Luni. The city was taken by surprise. The inhabitants and the bishop had just enough time to flee away, while the Muslims plundered the town and the countryside around undisturbed...From this moment on, the image of Luni emerges from the sources unanimously as a center hopelessly condemned to dissolution." (Busch, 288)

³³ Lodovico Siena (1746) describes: "l'anno 1264...Il Re [Manfredi] medesimo appena ebbe ciò risaputo, che tosto spedì contro dei crocesegnati della Marca un esercito di Saraceni condotti nuovamente dall'Africa, i quali furiosamente scorrendo da per tutto, giunti che furono a Sinigaglia col favor dei Ghibellini forusciti empivamente la saccheggiarono, e la distrussero".

confines we can find an indication of the influence of Christian-Muslim relations on Italian society.

These are examples of how a geographically sensitive historicized reading of the poem can show us how references within Europe should not be presumed to corroborate our assumptions about geographical knowledge and ideas. A geocritical reading of the *Commedia* must take into account more than just locations on a map and frequency of names in order to fully describe Dante's worldview. Such an understanding of the *Commedia* can then contribute to our appreciation of geographical ideas at Dante's time as well as Muslim-Christian relations in the medieval Mediterranean. The methodology employed is both informed by and can inform our ideas of what a geocritical reading of a text can achieve and how that reading can make contributions across disciplines and time periods.

The reverse is also true and we must not always take references to foreign places and peoples as truly signifying Dante's knowledge about and opinion of them. More often than not, when the poet references a foreign group he is using them as a comparison to his more familiar Christian, Florentine society. In *Purgatorio* 23 Dante encounters his old friend Forese Donati among the gluttons and is astonished at how quickly he has climbed the mountain given that he only died less than five years before their meeting. Forese reveals that it is the prayers and tears of his beloved widow Nella that have hastened his purgation.³⁴ His praise for his righteous wife leads him to lament the fact that is she alone ("soletta" *Pur.* 23.93) in her good works. Forese decries that the women of Florence are so immodest that the time will soon come when it will be

³⁴ Con suoi prieghi devoti e con sospiri
tratto m'ha de la costa ove s'aspetta,
e liberato m'ha de li altri giri

She, with sighs and prayers devout has set me free
of that slope where one waits and has free me
from circles underneath this circle.

Pur. 23.88-90

necessary for it to be forbidden from the pulpit for Florentine women to display their full bosoms in public.³⁵ This leads him to denounce the necessity of legislating the modesty of Florentine women compared to foreign females who require no such laws:

Quai barbare fuor mai, quai saracine, cui bisognasse, per farle ir coperte, o spiritali o altre discipline?	What ordinances—spiritual, civil— were ever needed by barbarian or Saracen women to make them go covered? <div style="text-align: right;"><i>Pur.</i> 23.103-105</div>
---	---

This verse is most effectively glossed by the *Ottimo commento* when he explains:

le Barbere, le quali sono sì partite da' nostri costumi, e le Saraine, che sono così date alla lussuria...sì vanno coperte le mammelle e 'l petto; e voi, che dovete vivere per legge Romane, avrete bisogno d'essere scomunicate e piuvicate in piazza.

(The barbarian women, who are very distant from our customs, and the Saracen women, who are so given to lust...go around covering their breast and their chest; and you [Florentine women], who should be living by Roman law, would need to be excommunicated and shamed in the square.)

Here the reference to barbarian and Saracen women gives us a general idea of Italian prejudices against these populations at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Barbarian women are distant from any kind of law or reason and Saracen women are lascivious and lustful. Other commentators on the verse also evidence a particular awareness that Saracen women were known to be well-covered, despite their presumed heresy and sinfulness. The commentator of the *Chiose Cagliaritanne* explains:

Dicie chi l'ha vedute che le saracine vanno tanto turate che del volto quasi non mostrano o de carne innuda....ma grave giudicio verrà sopra esse.

³⁵ ...sarà in pergamo interdetto
 a le sfacciate donne fiorentine
 l'andar mostrando con le poppe il petto.

...from the pulpit, it shall be forbidden
 to those immodest ones—Florentine women—
 to go displaying bosoms with bare paps.

Pur. 23.100-102

Olson (2015) has examined the historical antecedent of the interdiction referenced here and situated it within the larger history of sumptuary legislation in fourteenth century Italy.

(Those who have seen them say that Saracen women are so covered that they show barely nothing of their face or bare skin...but they will be gravely judged.)

Here Dante is combining the apparently common knowledge that Saracen women are generally quite covered alongside the prejudice that they are morally inferior to Christian women.³⁶

However, the entire episode is truly focused on the contemporary practices of Florentine women and the way they were received within that society by their contemporaries. Although the reference to Muslims is patently obvious through the word choice, a close reading of the passage generates far more information on fourteenth century Florentine women rather than any specific understanding of Italian views on Muslim-Christian relations. Conversely, the less apparent connection to Muslims evident in the early commentaries on the Arles reference in *Inferno* 9 provides us with deeper insight than standard medieval stereotypes about Muslims.

A similar use of foreign populations as a foil for European Christians occurs in *Paradiso* 19 when the poet reminds his readers that many supposed “Christians” will be derided on the day of judgment by non-Christian foreigners for their hypocrisy and lack of faith.³⁷ Throughout this canto he refers generically to Indians, Ethiopians and Persians as representative populations.³⁸

³⁶ Guido da Pisa makes a similar comparison between Saracen and Christian behaviors in a sermon from 1303. He tells his audience that a Muslim will never allow anything bad to be said of the prophet Muhammad while many Christians take the lord’s name in vain. Guido exhorts his listeners to consider: “Vedi quanta reverenzia hanno al nome di uno profeta, e sono cani” (“See how much reverence they have for the name of a prophet, and they are dogs” 428)

³⁷ e tai Cristian dannerà l’Etiòpe,
quando si partiranno i due collegi,
l’uno in eterno ricco e l’altro inòpe

The Ethiopian will shame such Christians
when the two companies are separated,
the one forever rich, the other poor.

Par. 19.109-11

³⁸ See Chapter 2 for discussion of the representation of the man born on the banks of the Indus (*Par* 19. 70-78). For the Persians:

Che poran dir li Perse a’ vostri regi,
come vedranno quel volume aperto
nel qual si scrivon tutti suoi dispregi?

What shall the Persians, when they come to see
that open volume in which they shall read
the misdeeds of your rulers, say to them?

Par. 19. 112-114

While his choice to refer specifically to these groups of peoples can give us a generic idea about foreign populations that he was familiar with, this is not a reference which is meant to illustrate any specific knowledge he may have of their customs or practices. Ingrid Baumgärtner has argued that European descriptions of foreign peoples “generally reflected Christian ideas of order and moral standards...and also served as a starting point for European self-reflection” (327). In the following chapters we will see that European ideas about non-European populations show a great deal of nuance and that Dante is able to deal with these ideas in complex ways. While these particular references to foreign populations are worth noting, for our geocritical reading it is important to recognize that the majority of the information gleaned from a close reading of these episodes tells us far more about the Europeans being compared than the populations being held up as comparisons.

In order to further conduct a geographically sensitive historicized reading, following the model which has been established above, there are a number of toolsets which must be applied. First of all, a thorough understanding of the geographical and cartographical knowledge of Dante’s age is a crucial step in the geocritical approach. This is the strategy which has been employed the longest in Dante studies and it is through the pioneering work of scholars like Moore and Revelli that we have a solid understanding of the geographical and cartographical source material that Dante was most likely engaging with in constructing his worldview. Beyond this we must also bring in an understanding of the historical circumstances in which this geographical engagement was taking place. As Puchades has shown for the field of cartography, this is crucial to understanding not just what medieval maps represented but how they were used, who was using them and the various ways in which their information was circulating. We have

also seen the importance of historical background for understanding the significance behind many of the poet's geographical references, the knowledge of which allows us to completely reinterpret what he meant by making a certain comparison or using a specific description. Finally, we must take into account the material conditions of engagement with these texts. We will never be able to know exactly what maps Dante would have looked at, but an awareness of how these sources were circulating and the spheres in which their knowledge would have been accessible can give us a closer approximation to understanding the range of Dante's potential access to knowledge and ideas. More broadly, we must also take into account the conditions in which Dante's geographical ideas have been received over time. During the past seven centuries Dante's geography has remained the same, but the assumptions and knowledge of his readers have vastly changed. By tracing the various ways in which the scholarly tradition has engaged with the poem's representations of the world, we become better equipped to judge the contributions on the basis of what they offer to Dante scholarship.

Looking Ahead

The following chapters engage with the proposed aims and methods of this dissertation in different but complementary ways. Chapter two, entitled "Defining Dante's World: The Margins and The Center" looks at Dante's macroscopic view of the world and how he defines its parameters. This chapter takes into account medieval methods of representing the whole world, particularly the genre of *mappaemundi*, and considers how Dante's construction of his worldview fits within the tradition. In analyzing the various choices made by the poet, we see that many of the significant points on his globe accord with the medieval mapping tradition. His location of Jerusalem at the center of the world, equidistant from Spain in the West and India in

the East accords with the majority of the *mappaemundi* of his time. However, rather than just accepting these choices as standard, this chapter looks further into the tradition of mapping them and situates Dante within the nuances of this tradition and elucidates the significance of his choices among others made by his contemporaries. Where Dante's worldview differs significantly from the majority opinion of his day is in his invention of the mountain of purgatory in the southern hemisphere and his relocation of the Garden of Eden from the East to the top of that mountain. The significance of these choices has repercussions not just for his concept of purgatory, but also for the portrayal of the East in his work, a portrayal which is importantly different from any other medieval representation.

After considering how he defines his entire world view, chapter three focuses in on Dante's relationship to the navigational and cartographical spheres of the medieval Mediterranean. This chapter, entitled "Charting Dante's Mediterranean: Ulysses, Navigational Technology, and *Portolani*" considers the level of engagement the poet would have had with newer forms of cartographical representation at his time, the portolan or navigational charts. In addressing this topic, it is first important to establish the relationship between navigational charts and the contemporary *mappaemundi*, based on the latest research in the history of cartography which posits an interesting exchange of methods and ideas between the two forms of mapping. We must also take into account the environment in which these charts were being produced and disseminated and the interrelation between the spheres of cartography, navigation, trade, economic growth, and religious warfare. This chapter illustrates that Dante was incredibly well versed in the language of navigation and the latest cartography of the Mediterranean, and that his

text is circulating in a developing mercantile society and the impact of this circulation is evident in how the poet represents the complexities of this society.

The complex intercultural relations which underlie the cartographic expansion of the early fourteenth century are explored from a social and cultural perspective in chapter four, entitled “Mapping Maometto: The Geographical Stakes of *Inferno* 28.” This chapter considers the question of Dante’s depiction of the founder of Islam and situates his choices alongside contemporary social, cultural and religious concerns of the period. The chapter is particularly focused on how the poet’s choices have been read in the centuries which followed, with a focus on a specific trend in the last century which attempts to distance Dante’s choices from any significant cultural knowledge and define them as medieval ignorance rather than reasoned decision. By comparing the earliest commentaries to contemporary trends we can see that the discussion is being influenced by modern assumptions about medieval geography and cultural knowledge rather than by a close analysis of the oldest sources. This chapter is followed by an excursus on the relationship between the figure of Maometto and the Italian schismatic Fra Dolcino who is named by Maometto in a prophecy. In this excursus we look at the similarities between how the two figures are described in medieval polemical literature against Islam and the Apostolic sect of Fra Dolcino. Through this comparison we can see that the language describing the schism of Fra Dolcino and that of Maometto does not focus on the Italian origin of one and the foreign origin of the other. We see far more overlap than distinction, which shows us that contemporary expectations about medieval ignorance of the other is based more on our own biases and assumptions than on a consultation of the facts.

I contend that studies of literary geography need to go beyond questions of maps and place names in order to fully explore the range of geographical and spatial issues which are raised within these texts and from which we can glean valuable insights. Much of my approach to Dante's geography has been inspired by theorists and scholars who do just that. Barbara Piatti and Lorenz Hurni remind us that "A literary-geographical reading can change our understanding-not only of books, but of the world we live in" (222). By understanding the multi-faceted importance of Dante's geography we gain an insight into his society and his view of it and we can also gain a strategy for understanding the geographical role of literary texts. The world of Dante's *Commedia* is not as distant from ours as it may seem. It has supplied us with many of our geographical ideas and assumptions and the ideas which informed it or were informed by it are still circulating within our literary and cultural discourse. This is particularly significant when we are considering how the *Commedia* represents the world outside of Europe. As the early twenty-first century proves to be a time of rising nationalist sentiment and xenophobia, it is particularly crucial that we look toward our medieval predecessors for a deeper understanding of how their ideas and assumptions have contributed to the culture that we have inherited. Dante's *Commedia* may be the national text of Italy, but around the world, right-wing parties are citing medieval origins for their claims to cultural superiority and race based elitism. A consideration of the medieval source material does not support these assertions and through the development of these new modes of geocritical reading we can deconstruct the myth of monolithic, ignorant and closed medieval origins of our contemporary cultures.

Chapter 2.

Defining Dante's World: The Margins and the Center

Quel mar che la terra inghirlanda

Paradiso 9. 84

As the pilgrim of the *Commedia* stumbles over boulders in hell and climbs up the mountain of purgatory, the poet is actively creating the parameters of a fictional realm which is firmly embedded in a historical and geographical reality. Although Dante is making his own authorial choices on the locations of hell, the Earthly Paradise and the realm of purgatory, these choices are situated within a long tradition of scholarship which had been continuously debating these locations as serious geographical questions. Theologians were quite concerned with understanding and representing humanity's place in the universe, as well as the progression of human history as presented in the scriptures. While the aims of Dante's work go far beyond the establishment of the locations of his hell and purgatory, it is important to recognize that within the poem every geographical choice has deep metaphorical, spiritual and historical significance. This chapter is subtitled "The Margins and the Center" because it will deal with the question of Dante's worldview on a macroscopic level and consider how he defines the large-scale parameters of his world.

Even the simplest edition of the *Commedia* will include the familiar image of Dante's globe with the cone of Inferno going down through the center leading to the mountain of purgatory jutting out of the southern hemisphere. The entrance of hell is identified near the city of Jerusalem which is also established as the center of the inhabited land through a number of geographical periphrases throughout the poem. These periphrases also serve to establish the

Ganges river as the Easternmost point of the northern hemisphere and the strait of Gibraltar as the Westernmost point. The southern hemisphere is made up only of water with the exception of the mountain of purgatory, which sits at the center of the watery hemisphere opposite Jerusalem.

The theological significance of making these geographical claims was not only relevant for an author creating his view of the afterlife, but a common consideration of the medieval mapping tradition. Some medieval mapmakers did not see themselves as geographers but rather primarily as theologians and historians. Their creations were meant not only for the viewer to learn about the physical world, but also through the act of beholding the world, to come closer to God. It is clear that Dante's geographical descriptions and choices, which appear in all of his works and give us a very detailed understanding of how he viewed the world, can be included within this multi-faceted tradition. This inclusion serves a twofold purpose and bridges an important gap between scholars of literature and historians of cartography. Situating the *Commedia's* geographical claims historically and culturally helps readers of Dante better understand how he is in dialogue with the sources and ideas of his time. Similarly, providing an analysis of Dante's use of geography within his writings allows historians of cartography to cite his references more accurately alongside archival and non-literary sources.

Dante's work interacts with geographical ideas on multiple levels, from his understanding of the globe and its continents to the most minute reference to a specific location in Italy. This chapter will consider Dante's geography broadly and analyze how he constructs the limits and center of his world and situates his afterlife in relationship to these points. Through this analysis we will see how he often reflects the common beliefs of his age but also how he is selective and creative in how he uses his sources—and occasionally defies them altogether. This chapter will

trace Dante's engagement with the geographical tradition of his day and uncover how much he agrees or disagrees with the opinions of his contemporaries. We will explore his relationship to medieval ideas by progressively tracing his interventions—from those which mostly concur with accepted knowledge to those which radically re-imagine the medieval view of the world.

His choice to indicate Jerusalem as the center of his world can be seen to accord with a number of thirteenth-century sources, but this choice is situated within a long tradition and it is necessary to understand the stakes of that tradition in order to truly appreciate the significance of Dante's placement of the holy city. Similarly, his engagement with the Far East shows an awareness of the opinions and ideas which preceded him, but his relocation of the Earthly Paradise to the southern hemisphere pushes back at some of the assumptions of his contemporaries. This relocation is only possible due to his invention of the mountain of purgatory, a significant departure from the ideas circulating at his time. All of these choices have important cultural ramifications which have not received enough attention in Dante scholarship.

Mappaemundi

In order to understand the significance of the margins and the center of Dante's worldview, it is first necessary to understand the main medieval sources which were engaged with these questions, the *mappaemundi*. When Dante makes highly specific references to places in Italy, or to geographical descriptions which indicate a precise knowledge of navigational charts of the Mediterranean, these choices might be based on first or second hand knowledge. However, in trying to provide an overview of the entire world, the poet can only base his choices on the sources which preceded him and must position himself within a series of ongoing and theoretical debates. The *mappaemundi* tradition had been developing for at least a thousand years

before Dante started writing and this long time span had produced a number of vastly different positions which were constantly changing.³⁹

In fact, even the definition of what constituted a *mappamundi* was very broad and up for debate. P.D.A. Harvey highlights that what a medieval reader understood as a *mappamundi* was much broader than our current conception of a specific image of the world: “they would not have seen them, as we do, as maps distinct from diagrams on the one hand and from pictures on the other” (283). In medieval sources the term *mappamundi* can be applied to a written text which describes the world, an image inspired by biblical sources or even to describe what we would now consider a navigational chart.⁴⁰ Some scholars assert that the *Commedia* itself constitutes a type of *mappamundi*. Hawkins argues that the poem can be seen as: “a complex map of words that builds upon (and by and large reflects) a contemporary cartographer’s notion of the world and its position in the cosmos” (267). Due to our current ideas about what constitutes a “map” and what kinds of works engage with serious geographical questions, Hawkins’ assertion might seem radical. However, considering the wide variety of sources which medieval authors considered ‘*mappaemundi*’ such a description of Dante’s poem would have been perfectly understandable to his contemporaries.

The fluidity with which medieval authors used this term serves to remind us that the stakes of representing the world were much higher than just the necessity to answer geographical questions. As modern readers we may often approach cartographical markers in the text as purely

³⁹ The Albi map (c. 732) is often considered the oldest extant *mappamundi* (see Edson (1997), 32 and Woodward, 301). However, the geographical sources of the mapping tradition (i.e. Orosius, Macrobius and Solinus) date from the third and fourth centuries A.D.

⁴⁰ In fact, the first documented reference to a navigational chart refers to the item in question as a “*mappamundi*.” See chapter three, page 87.

serving a geographical purpose. However, in order to truly approximate the medieval significance of these geographical inclusions we must be open to readings which go beyond the physical locations and consider cultural and historical significance. Many of these geographical components can be identified in a number of the unifying features of the *mappaemundi* tradition. The earth was depicted as a round landmass surrounded by water on all sides. Images of the world were oriented with the East at the top because of the importance of the Earthly Paradise, which was considered to lie just beyond the inhabited eastern edge of the world.⁴¹ There was generally little regard for geographical accuracy and anyone hoping to use a *mappamundi* to get from one point to another would be sorely disappointed. Mapmakers took great care to include numerous important historical locations and events from both biblical and classical sources, leading to the depiction of certain cities or peoples next to each other who were actually separated by several centuries.

We can identify Dante's engagement with this tradition in a number of the beliefs he espouses throughout his work. He believes that the habitable land is surrounded by water on all sides and refers to this surrounding water in *Paradiso* 9.84 as "quel mar che la terra inghirlanda" (that sea which encircles the world). His mixing of classical and biblical referents would not have been surprising to mapmakers who depicted Alexander the Great's journeys in India next to the tomb of the disciple Thomas in the same region.⁴² We also get a glimpse of Dante as a user of *mappaemundi* in a very telling geographical description of Arabia. In *Inferno*

⁴¹ The importance of the eastern orientation of medieval maps is evidenced within the etymology of the verb 'orient' itself. Although we now use it generically, the Oxford English Dictionary reminds us of its literal meaning: "to place or arrange a thing so as to face the East."

⁴² For instance, Dante describes the Carthaginians as "arabi" in *Paradiso* 6. 49, despite the fact that the Arabs would not conquer Tunisia until about four and a half centuries after the time of Hannibal described in this verse.

24 the poet compares the snakes in the circle of the thieves to the creatures described by classical sources as being found in Libya, Ethiopia and Arabia. He names the first two regions explicitly, but in order to refer to Arabia he calls it “ciò che di sopra al Mar Rosso è” (that which is above the Red Sea [*Inf.* 24.90]). Arabia can only be considered above the Red Sea on a map which is oriented with the East at the top.⁴³ An example of such a depiction can be seen on Pietro Vesconte’s 1320 planisphere (see fig. 1), where Arabia is clearly above the “mare rubeum.”



Fig 1. Close up of Arabia and the Red Sea from: Pietro Vesconte, *Planisphere*, circa 1320, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Reg. Lat. 548, 139r; https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Reg.lat.548

While we can trace these general instances of Dante’s reliance upon maps of this tradition, we must also be careful not to overgeneralize a very diverse cartographical discipline. There are a number of different mapping schemes which can be traced through the thousand years preceding the *Commedia*, and which influenced how cartographers depicted the world and what they emphasized in that image. There are considered to be three fundamental sources whose works inspired different traditions: Macrobius (ca. 395-436), Orosius (ca. 383-post 417), and

⁴³ This cannot be the description of a standard nautical chart, as those were made to be rotated as they were used and had no fixed orientation.

Isidore (ca. 560-636), although we often find maps which take from a mix of these three or depart from some of their contentions.⁴⁴ Macrobian maps represent a zonal view of the world, with the temperate zones being those which are inhabited. The furthest edges and the very center are identified as uninhabitable due to their extreme climates (see fig. 2). David Woodward identifies at least 150 extant maps following the Macrobian schema.⁴⁵



Fig. 2 Zonal map c. 1050, British Library, Harley MS 2772; <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/zonal-world-map>

Orosius' *History Against the Pagans* was used for almost all major *mappaemundi*, although we have no evidence that the original work itself included any kind of map.⁴⁶ This is important to note, as it highlights the fact that from the medieval perspective a *mappamundi* did not have to have a drawn or diagrammatic component. Dante is known to have been quite

⁴⁴ I follow the periodization defined by Woodward who identifies these three as founders of mapping traditions during the “patristic period of the fathers of the church” (299).

⁴⁵ “Over 150 *mappaemundi* drawn according to the Macrobian schema are found in manuscripts of the *Commentary of the Dream of Scipio* from the 9th cent to the 15th, and throughout several other works such as the *Liber floridus* of Lambert of Saint-Omer (ca. 1120) and the *De philosophia* of William of Conches (ca. 1130)” (300).

⁴⁶ Woodward argues: “In the absence of any map known to have been drawn by Orosius himself, it is not possible to decide whether maps bearing the influence of the Orosian writings were based on a single map tradition from the time of Orosius or whether several independent map traditions were based on later versions of the text” (301).

familiar with Orosius as a geographical source and explicitly cites him in *De Monarchia* to establish the limits of Africa.⁴⁷ He again refers to his authority on the limits of the habitable world in his *Quaestio de aqua et terra* in a way which matches perfectly with the world he constructs throughout the *Commedia*: “For, as is held by all these in common, this habitable part stretches longitudinally from Gades, established by Hercules on the Western boundary, to the mouths of the river Ganges, as Orosius writes.”⁴⁸

Writing more than a century later than the first two, Isidore also relied on Macrobius and Orosius along with many other classical sources. Isidore is considered to have solidified the famous TO model of the world in which the three continents are surrounded by an ocean (O) and intersected by a T of waters: the Mediterranean sea in the West, the Nile river in the south and the Don river in the north. However, Woodward grants him his own category within the *mappaemundi* tradition because of the importance of the TO map which, although the idea existed before him, is made most explicit in his writings.⁴⁹

The time in which Dante is writing is considered the beginning of the transitional period

47 “Quod vero Athlas de Affrica fuerit, mons in illa suo nomine dictus est testis, quem esse in Affrica **dicat Orosius** in sua mundi descriptione sic: «Ultimus autem finis eius est mons Athlas et insule quas Fortunatas vocant»; 'eius', idest Affrice, quia de ipsa loquebatur.”

(“That Atlas came from Africa is confirmed by the mountain there which bears his name. Orosius in his description of the world tells us it is in Africa in these words: “Its furthest boundary is Mount Atlas and the islands they call Fortunate” (“its” meaning “Africa’s”, because he is talking about Africa).”) *De Monarchia* II.iii.87.

48 “Nam, ut comuniter ab omnibus habetur, hec habitabilis extenditur per lineam longitudinis a Gadibus, que supra terminos occidentales ab Hercule positos ponitur, usque ad hostia fluminis Ganges, ut scribit Orosius.”

49 Woodward organizes *mappaemundi* into four categories: zonal, tripartite, quadripartite and transitional (296). The zonal maps are those influenced by Macrobius and the tripartite are the basic TO form established by Isidore. Quadripartite maps are similar to tripartite but may include a fourth continent in the antipodes, which Isidore argued for in his worldview. Transitional maps are those which show some influence from navigational charts starting at the end of the thirteenth century and these will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

that took place from 1300-1460. It is considered transitional because most *mappaemundi* produced during this period have some influence from the developing genre of navigational charts and we begin to see a hybrid form incorporating both the stylistic and didactic features of the *mappaemundi* tradition alongside the geographical specificity of the charts. Fra Mauro's map (which Woodward dates at 1459, see fig. 3) is considered the last version of the genre. It is still circular and highly decorated, but its Mediterranean coastlines show the influence of navigational charts and its southern orientation shows some Arabic influence.⁵⁰

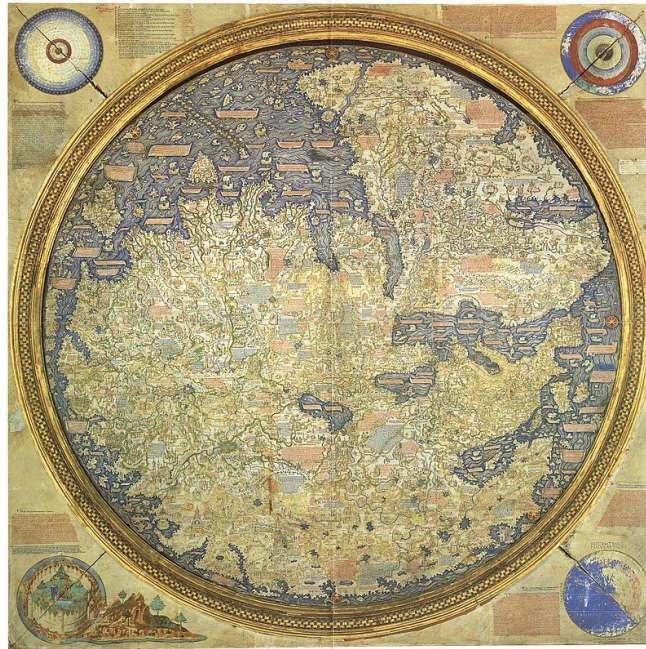


Fig. 3 Fra Mauro, *Mappamundi*, c. 1459, Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana; <http://www.myoldmaps.com/late-medieval-maps-1300/249-fra-mauros-mappamundi/>

It is important to be aware that Dante is positioned at the beginning of this transitional time, as *mappaemundi* would continue to be produced for more than another century, but at the same time much of the geographical dogma was being challenged. For most of its history the mapping tradition had been based on a select number of classical sources, with biblical authority

⁵⁰ See Woodward (316).

being the final say in which ideas could be accepted or not. Faithful recreation of the classical model was valued over the introduction of new ideas based on observation or lived experience. In fact, some medieval thinkers actually forbid mapmakers from changing their images based on something as insignificant as knowledge of the real world, and therefore mapmakers could continue to produce errors of fourth century geographers which contradicted their actual knowledge of geography.⁵¹ However, the increasing emphasis in the world of chartmaking on first hand experience and navigational utility also influenced the production of *mappaemundi*, despite the fact that they were not designed for practical purposes. Dante's period sees a growing use of scientific accuracy in producing charts as well as an emphasis on practically relevant cities, such as ports and trading locations, rather than places referred to in classical texts.

There are many ways in which Dante's geography can be seen to be influenced by these developments, and many parallels can be found between the way in which the navigational milieu influenced the drawn *mappaemundi* tradition and Dante's poetic construction of his own *mappamundi*. The third chapter will explore further Dante's relationship to the navigational charts which were doing so much to change ideas about space and its representation in the medieval Mediterranean. As we have begun to see, Dante's work is populated with many of the medieval geographical ideas which also made up the *mappamundi* tradition, but he very rarely accepts any one view without some innovation or commentary. His unorthodoxy has been well noted in questions of religion, politics and philosophical views, therefore it is no surprise that he should be similarly bold in his geographical choices.

⁵¹ Moore reports that "the author of the celebrated Hereford Map copies blunders of Orosius even about the British Isles, when the means of correction were both ready to hand and patent to any person of average intelligence." (142)

Boxing the Compass

Although many *mappaemundi* show a world similar to the one described in the *Commedia*, none approximate exactly Dante's poetic worldview. As we know, his world stretches from the Ganges river in the East to Spain in the West. Jerusalem is the central point which connects along a perpendicular axis to the mountain of purgatory in the southern hemisphere. References to these important points appear throughout the poem, but they are perfectly laid out in the second canto of *Purgatorio*:

Già era 'l sole a l'orizzonte guinto
lo cui meridian cerchio coverchia
Ierusalèm col suo più alto punto;

e la notte, che opposita a lui cerchia,
uscita di Gange fuor con le bilance,
che le caggion di man quando soverchia

Sì che le bianche e le vermiglie guance,
là dov' i' era, de la bella Aurora
per troppa etate divenivan rance

By now the sun was crossing the horizon
of the meridian whose highest point
covers Jerusalem; and from the Ganges,

night, circling opposite the sun, was moving
together with the Scales that, when the length
of dark defeats the day, desert night's hand

so that, above the shore that I had reached,
the fair Aurora's white and scarlet cheeks
were, as Aurora aged, becoming orange.

Pur. 2.1-9

These three *terzine* are Dante's way of establishing that the sun is rising in the southern hemisphere as he begins his journey up the mountain. This complicated periphrasis serves to state that it is midnight at the Ganges river and implies that it is noon in the West. The sun is rising in purgatory which means it has just set in Jerusalem. This establishes a difference of six hours between each location of the equidistant points covered by the meridian.

A similar axis from east to west can be seen on the Hereford Map (c. 1300, fig. 4). In many ways this *mappamundi* serves as an excellent example of the conventions of the genre. Although more elaborate than earlier examples, the Isidoran TO format is maintained in the slim

body of water which encircles the land and the intersection of the Nile and Don rivers with the Mediterranean sea visible on the bottom half.



Fig. 4 Hereford World Map, c. 1300, Hereford Cathedral; <https://www.themappamundi.co.uk/>

This is not a map which was meant to provide directions to a traveler and therefore accuracy in depicting the distances between places or shapes of continents is not prioritized. Instead, this map is meant to give the viewer an idea of the world in a geographical, theological and historical sense. The same could be said for Dante's geographically defined astronomical periphrases. The actual Ganges river or straits of Gibraltar are not relevant as places of residence, but merely as symbolic markers for the easternmost or westernmost point of the world. As we can see in a close-up from the top portion of the map (fig 4.1), the Ganges river delta is visible at

the left of this image and is the easternmost point of physical geography indicated by the mapmaker. However, unlike Dante, this mapmaker locates the Earthly Paradise in the East and therefore it takes pride of place at the top of the map. This was the standard practice in cartography well after Dante's time and later in this chapter we will explore the theological and cultural implications of Dante's choice to relocate the Earthly Paradise to a mountain in the southern hemisphere. On the bottom of the map we can clearly see the pillars of Hercules in the Straits of Gibraltar as the westernmost point, helpfully labeled in red by the mapmaker as "terminus europe" (fig 4.2). Drawn dramatically in the middle of the Hereford map is the city of Jerusalem, a choice which mirrors Dante's literary and theological emphasis on the holy city. It depicts the figure of Christ crucified above a picture of a circular city (fig 4.3).



Fig 4.1 detail of East (above)



Fig 4.2 detail of West (above)



Fig 4.3 detail of Jerusalem (right)

The Hereford Map can be usefully compared to Dante's worldview because it shares the same east-west axis and furthest limits of the earth in the northern hemisphere. However, it is not a perfect illustration of Dante's world and there are many important ways in which the two differ.⁵² While Dante was certainly aware of the genre and the theological and scientific debates surrounding the edges of the world, he can never be said to be a passive participant in any important conversation. Dante scholarship which addresses his geography often takes the parameters of his world for granted. For instance, Natalino Sapegno explains that Dante is "d'accordo con la geografia del suo tempo" (in agreement with the geography of his time). While the use of these four points to mark the parameters of the world has some precedence in the medieval cartographic tradition, they were continually up for debate and multiple opinions existed, often simultaneously. It is not enough merely to identify how Dante defined the parameters of his worldview, we must also be able to situate him within the larger cartographical tradition.

This is a particularly understudied aspect of the conversation surrounding Dante's representation of Jerusalem as the center of the world. The entries on the city in the Dante Encyclopedia, the *Enciclopedia Dantesca* and multiple commentaries all present the central location of Jerusalem as a given in the Middle Ages.⁵³ However, the reality is much more complicated and by understanding the development of medieval ideas on how to situate Jerusalem we can gain a better appreciation for the choices that Dante makes and their larger significance.

⁵² It is also impossible to argue that Dante would have seen a map created around 1300 in England, although it can stand in as being indicative of the genre at the period.

⁵³ For example in the commentaries of Singleton, Chiavacci Leonardi and Fosca.

The Center

As Dante and Virgil climb out of hell along the back of Satan, the pilgrim asks his guide to pause and explain how Lucifer is upside down, where the ice has gone and how it has so quickly become morning. Virgil explains that they are no longer in the northern hemisphere:

E se' or sotto l'emisperio giunto
Ch'è contraposto a quel che la gran secca
Coverchia, e sotto 'l cui colmo consunto

And now you stand beneath the hemisphere
opposing that which cloaks the great dry lands
and underneath whose zenith died the Man

Fa l'uom che nacque e visse senza pecca
Tu hai i piedi in su picciola spera
Che l'altra faccia fa de la Giudecca

whose birth and life were sinless in this world.
Your feet are placed upon a little sphere
that forms the other face of the Judecca.

Inf. 34.112-117

The Man whose birth and life were sinless in this world is Christ and the zenith where he died is Jerusalem. This explanation establishes that the pilgrim and his guide are exactly opposite Jerusalem, illustrating the axis which connects the city to purgatory, going directly through the earth and Lucifer's body. While *Purgatorio* 2 named Jerusalem as the center point on an east-west axis and as the antipodes to the mountain of purgatory, here we get a sense of the theological and poetic importance of Jerusalem's location.

The significance of this axis which connects Jerusalem to purgatory through Lucifer's body is specific to Dante and has often been emphasized by scholars of the *Commedia*. Alison Cornish explains: "By fixing Eden along the same axis as Satan (stuck in the center of the earth) and Jerusalem, Dante spatially aligns the pivotal human events of sin, punishment, redemption, and expiation" (63). While the importance of Jerusalem as the location of Christ's crucifixion was represented in various ways, as seen in one example from the Hereford map, Dante is alone in linking the crucifixion geographically to the punishments of hell and the transgression of

Satan. Peter Hawkins offers further explanation in the “Jerusalem” entry of the Dante Encyclopedia: “Here geography does the work of theology: sin and redemption are shown to be understandable only in terms of what took place in Jerusalem” (536). In this way the sin of Eden which caused the fall of man, and was the result of Satan’s temptation, is connected to the death of Christ which reopens the path to redemption and grace after man’s initial fall.

The connection is described again in *Purgatorio* 4 as Virgil attempts to help Dante understand the new astronomy of the southern hemisphere:

<p>imagina Sion con questo monte in su la terra stare sì, ch’amendue hanno un solo orizzòn e diversi emisperi</p>	<p>imagining this mountain so placed upon this earth that both Mt Zion and it, although in different hemispheres share one horizon</p>
---	--

Pur. 4.68-71

This establishes that the horizon which passes from Mount Zion, one of the cities of old Jerusalem, to Mount Purgatory cuts through the center of the world, emphasizing their direct relationship to each other. The relationship of course is not purely geographical, but also reflects the connection between the sin which was committed at the top of the mountain of purgatory and was redeemed at Mt. Zion.

Aspects of this conception of geographical axes reflecting the sacrifice of Christ can be seen in the medieval *mappaemundi* tradition, and the Hereford map also includes Jerusalem on a theologically significant axis. On the Hereford map that axis travels from east to west, beginning in the Earthly Paradise and passing through the Tower of Babel, Jerusalem, Rome, and the Pillars of Hercules, all of which are approximately equidistant on the map. The theological significance is underscored by the image of Jesus on the cross over the city of Jerusalem and the centrality of the city underscores the centrality of this event in Christian history. The Ebstorf map of about the

same period (mid thirteenth-century, fig. 5) takes this theological east-west axis and makes it even more explicit by beginning with Jesus' head in the East and ending with his feet in the West.⁵⁴ The map depicts Jesus as literally embodying the world, with his head and feet at the East and west and his hands encircling the globe on the north and south edges, the northern hand bearing a stigma.



Fig 5. Ebstorf Map, c. 1235, Hanover (destroyed 1942), <http://www2.leuphana.de/ebskart/>

While Dante certainly includes Christ within the geography of his worldview, it is significant that his Christological axis only intersects with lived geography at the point of

⁵⁴ Woodward posits 1234 as the earliest possible date for the Ebstorf map (307). Although the original was destroyed during an air raid in World War II, numerous black and white photos and colored facsimiles remain.

Jerusalem and instead of traversing the globe from east to west, it travels from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere. It extends through the center of the earth and comes out in the realm of purgatory which only exists due to Christ's death on the cross and the subsequent re-opening of the possibility of salvation for mankind.

The poet conflates the world clock of *Purgatorio* 2 with the Christological significance of *Inferno* 34 in the first verses of *Purgatorio* 27:

Si come quando i primi raggi vibra là dove il suo fattor lo sangue sparse, cadendo Ibero sotto l'alta Libra,	Just as, there where its Maker shed His blood, the sun shed its first rays, and Ebro lay beneath high Libra, and the ninth hour's rays
e l'onde in Gange da non rïarse, sì stava il sole; onde 'l giorno sen giva, come l'angel di Dio lieto ci apparse	were scorching Ganges' waves; so here, the sun stood at the point of day's departure when God's angel—happy—showed himself to us.
	<i>Pur.</i> 27.1-6

Again the poet shows us that the importance of Jerusalem in the *Commedia's* worldview lies in its association with Christ's suffering on the cross. Although other thinkers and mapmakers emphasized the importance of Jerusalem through the lens of the bible, Dante is alone in establishing a physical geographical connection between the fall of Lucifer, the original sin, and the crucifixion of Christ. In the commentary tradition the novelty of Dante's intervention and re-orientation of the Christological axis is often diminished by anachronistic modern readings which see his choices as being inescapably influenced by medieval conceptions of world geography and the necessity of a central Jerusalem.

We have drawn parallels between Dante's world view and those presented on the Hereford and Ebstorf world maps in order to better contextualize the geographical ideas of his age. However, these two important maps should by no means be taken to represent the entirety of

geographical knowledge circulating at the time. While both of these maps feature a prominently centered Jerusalem, Woodward argues that it is perhaps their size and significance which has led scholars of cartography to overemphasize the importance of a central Jerusalem in the medieval worldview and that in fact there was much more diversity in the tradition than popular opinion would lead one to believe.⁵⁵

The modern assertion of the importance of Jerusalem as the center of the earth in medieval thought often hinges on the expectation of a literal reading of Ezekiel 5:5 which states “Thus says the Lord God: This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her.”⁵⁶ It is true that many authors from Saint Jerome (347-420) onwards argued for the literal interpretation of this passage. However, this did not mean that no medieval thinkers were able to see the passage for its metaphorical sense. We will see through the examples of the mapping tradition that many medieval cartographers did not feel obliged to physically center the city on their maps. In fact, Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken has conducted an intensive study on the mapping of Jerusalem and found that its physical centrality is far from established within the tradition and when it is centrally located this is generally for political reasons rather than theological ones.

As already discussed, the influence of Isidore meant that the majority of medieval maps followed some version of the TO model, which meant that it was the intersection of the bodies of water separating the continents which naturally fell in the direct center of the map. None of our oldest extant *mappaemundi* attempt to depict Jerusalem centrally in a significant way, despite the

⁵⁵ See Woodward, 340 and von den Brincken, 367.

⁵⁶ Vulgate: “Hæc dicit Dominus Deus: Ista est Jerusalem: in medio gentium posui eam, et in circuitu ejus terras” (translation NRSV).

fact that Jerome's argument for its physical centrality predates them by several centuries.⁵⁷ Von den Brincken has shown that the first map to attempt to center Jerusalem is MS. 17, the Oxford or St. John's College Map (c. 1100), and that it actually depicts the holy city "floating" like an island in the intersecting waters of the T.⁵⁸ Although Jerome had proclaimed the importance of seeing Jerusalem as the navel of the world in the fourth century, it is not until the twelfth that any mapmaker attempts to physically depict it as such. Considering that the *mappaemundi* tradition was based on copying classical predecessors, it is by no means surprising that such a radical change was not attempted for so long.

More importantly, von den Brincken stresses the significance of the date of this first attempt, stating that "it is indisputable that at the time of the Crusades Jerusalem became a focus of interest" (373). She argues that the creator of the Oxford map was responding to the political climate of the First Crusade (c. 1099) which resulted in Christian control of Jerusalem until 1187. She notes that John of Wallingford is the next to depict Jerusalem centrally on his map (c. 1250) and argues that this is presumably in response to the fall of Jerusalem in 1244, which had been held again by the Christians from 1229. It is not until after the fall of Acre in 1291 and complete loss of Christian control in the holy land that we notice an increase of world maps explicitly centered on Jerusalem and emphasizing this centrality by shifting the T of waters slightly to the

⁵⁷ The Vatican Map (dated before 775) marks the city with an elaborate double-bordered star which is close to center but not explicitly placed there. The Albi map of the late eighth or early ninth century features the holy city off to the right allowing the *mare ionium* to fill the center of map. (see von den Brincken (2006), 358-9)

⁵⁸ von den Brincken (2006) explains: "since there was no map he could copy for the layout he envisaged...he created the schematic, unrealistic map that we have today (373)." Again we see the importance of copying exempla rather than updating the worldview to reflect contemporary geographical ideals.

left.⁵⁹

Even despite the importance of the Crusades for beginning this cartographical shift, it is important to note that up until the middle of the thirteenth century the Oxford map is one of the few. The Vercelli map, approximately a century later (between 1191-1218), does not center Jerusalem and neither does the simple world map of Matthew Paris (c. 1250). Even at the time when many maps did embrace the centrality of Jerusalem, there are still examples which do not accord it any particular importance. Of the twenty-one extant examples we have of the world maps of Benedictine monk Ranulf Higden (c. 1299-1363) hardly any center Rome or Jerusalem, although the cities do appear prominently in their respective positions. These differences of opinion show the diversity of representation within the tradition and evidences how the preoccupation with Jerusalem's location rose and fell with European interests in the holy land rather than being based on a static, dogmatic interpretation of scripture.

Understanding that Dante was in no way obliged to represent a perfectly central Jerusalem as a universally accepted truth, we can now analyze more precisely the stakes of his decision and their significance. Dante was writing his *Commedia* during approximately the same period as the creation of the Hereford and Ebstorf *mappaemundi* and therefore his emphasis on Jerusalem as the center of the world can be said to be part of the larger zeitgeist which influenced the creation of these important world maps. However, his choice must be understood to be just that, *a choice*, and therefore can be situated alongside his other references to Jerusalem, the holy

⁵⁹ Cecilia's encyclopedia entry on "Gerusalemme" lists the planisphere of Pietro Vesconte (c. 1320) as another example of a worldview contemporary to Dante with Jerusalem clearly centered. However, as will be explored further in the third chapter, the fact that this map was created to accompany Marino Sanudo's campaign for a new crusade again shows that Vesconte's placement of Jerusalem was far more political than scriptural.

land and crusading terminology. Although commentaries will tell us that Dante is following the bible or influenced by contemporary maps in locating Jerusalem centrally, based on the preceding examples we can argue that these models were not unchallenged. Numerous medieval authors argued against a literal interpretation of Ezekiel 5:5 and we now see that the mapping tradition was primarily politically motivated rather than theologically or geographically. To just relate that Dante is “following his contemporaries” diminishes the poetic and philosophical depth of his depiction. It is not only important to investigate when Dante’s geography diverges from the presumed accepted view of his time. Knowing that he is perfectly capable of eschewing convention, when he does seem to follow an established position it is also important to look at why that is. Once we have established that Dante was in no way required to accept Jerusalem as the physical center of the northern hemisphere, we can better appreciate the poetic symmetry that results from his choice to locate it there.

The West

Although Jerusalem might be geographically central and connected to the mountain of purgatory in the southern hemisphere, there is another city which is much more central in Dante’s cultural and political thought. In establishing the key points of his world Dante goes beyond the four locations referenced in *Purgatorio* 2. He asserts that Rome is the center of the West, equidistant from both Jerusalem and the Western edge of Spain. He first signals this relationship in the following canto when Virgil explains that he cannot cast a shadow in purgatory because his body is still in Italy, highlighting the time difference between the two locations:

Vespero è già colà dov' è sepolto
lo corpo dentro al quale io facea ombra:
Napoli l'ha, e da Brandizio è tolto.

It is now vespers there where is buried
the body from within which I cast shadows,
taken from Brindisi, it now belongs to Naples.

Pur. 3.25-27 (translation mine)

Vespers start at 3 p.m. and since the poet has established that the sun is rising in purgatory and has therefore just set in Jerusalem, this establishes a three hour time difference between Italy and Jerusalem. In *Purgatorio* 2 the poet has previously described a six hour time difference between Jerusalem and Spain and therefore Rome is now established as being the center of the Western world. The nine hour time difference between the southern mountain and Dante's home is reiterated in *Purgatorio* 15.6 when the poet, speaking as author writing in Italy, tells us it was vespers (3 p.m.) in the southern hemisphere when it was midnight in Italy: "vespero là e qui mezza notte era" (vespers was there; and where we are, midnight).

We have already seen that the central location of Dante's Jerusalem was not mandated by medieval convention. It should therefore be no surprise that he uses geographical centrality in order to mirror cultural significance and that he should mobilize this same parallel to establish the importance of the seat of classical culture and empire. Dante was not alone in considering Rome to be central both in significance and in geography during the Middle Ages. Von den Brincken has shown that before Jerusalem became the focus of cartographers in the wake of the Crusades, most maps centered on, or at least accorded great significance to, Rome.⁶⁰ This significance can be explained by two different factors. On the one hand, classical Rome was associated with cartographical knowledge and many of the geographical sources relied on by

⁶⁰ See von den Brincken (2001), 229.

medieval scholars were of Roman origin.⁶¹ At the same time, Rome was important to Western Christianity as the seat of the church, an importance which can be seen in its location on the east-west axis of salvation included on the Hereford map.

Rome is crucial in Dante's geographical imaginary and this importance must be literalized in some way on parallel with Jerusalem. What is so striking about Dante's emphasis on the centrality of Rome within the western hemisphere is that in *Purgatorio* 32 he surpasses the identification of Jerusalem with paradise and instead ascribes that significance to Rome, referring to heaven as "quella Roma onde Cristo è Romano" (that Rome in which Christ is Roman [*Pur.* 32.102]). Parallels between earthly Jerusalem and heavenly paradise were frequent in the Middle Ages, but Dante is in the minority in making such an explicit connection between Rome and heaven.⁶² Dante also implicitly compares Rome to Paradise when he compares his experience going from human to divine at the end of *Paradiso* as the same experience as a barbarian seeing the wonders of Rome for the first time.⁶³

Although his axis is different than the Hereford map, Dante maintains the even spacing between Jerusalem, Rome and the Pillars of Hercules and affirms their relationship to each other by his astronomical periphrases. This insistence on the central location of Rome in the western

⁶¹ The Hereford map contains a small emblem of Augustus Caesar on a throne assigning the mapping of the world to three geographers (see Westrem, 8-9). Also Macrobius, Orosius, Augustine and many other important medieval geographical sources were associated with Roman culture and learning.

⁶² Medieval associations of Jerusalem and paradise were often based on Revelation 21 which describes "the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." (21:2).

⁶³ Se i barbari...
veggendo Roma e l'ardüa sua opra,
stupefaciensi...io, che al divino da l'umano,
a l'eterno dal tempo era venuto,
e di Fiorenza in popol giusto e sano,
di che stupor dovea esser compiuto!"

If the Barbarians...
were, seeing Rome and her vast works
struck dumb...then what amazement must have filled me
when I to the divine came from the human
to eternity from time,
and to a people just and sane from Florence came!

Par. 31.31-40

hemisphere is particularly interesting because it leads to an incredibly inaccurate length for the Mediterranean sea. In chapter three we will see a poet who is aware of highly specific geographical details regarding the relationship between cities on the Mediterranean and the navigational routes taken between ports. However, in creating his overview of the world it appears that he prioritizes poetic significance over geographical accuracy. What is most striking about what might seem to be competing emphases on the part of the poet is in fact indicative of how medieval culture engaged with geographical information. This dual mode of engagement is often misunderstood by modern approaches to the history of cartography which prioritize scientific accuracy. Dante and his contemporaries were aware of the utility of increased cartographical and navigational exactitude and the influence of these innovations can be seen in expanding trade and exploration. However, they saw the theological and cultural significance of defining the parameters of the world and were not willing to sacrifice that importance to the blind pursuit of scientific precision.

The geographical inaccuracy of Dante's Mediterranean is again revisited in *Paradiso* 9 when Folchetto da Marsiglia begins a long periphrasis in order to describe the location of his birthplace, Marseille:

<p>“La maggior valle in che l’acqua si spanda,” incominciaro allor le sue parole, “fuor di quel mar che la terra inghirlanda,</p>	<p>The widest valley into which the waters spread from the sea that encircles the world, his words began, between discrepant shores, extends</p>
<p>tra ‘ discordanti liti contra ‘l sole tanto sen va, che fa meridiano là dove l’orizzonte pria far suole.</p>	<p>eastward so far against the sun, that when those waters end at the meridian, that point when they began was the horizon</p>

Par. 9.82-87

Folchetto begins by describing the Mediterranean as the largest body of water after “quel mar

che la terra inghirlanda” (the sea that encircles the world) or the O of the standard Isidoran map. This insistence on the large size of the Mediterranean is supported by his description that the sun would be at the meridian on one end when at the horizon on the other. This suggests a time difference of six hours between the westernmost edge of Spain and the city of Jerusalem. In order for this to be true the sea would have to have a width of 90 degrees longitude when in actuality it is only 42 degrees across.⁶⁴

This overemphasis on the scale of the Mediterranean sea in light of world geography is not only mathematically significant in the calculations suggested by the poem, but also in the number of references to the West as well as the level of variation employed by the poet when describing the West as compared to the East. Over the course of the *Commedia* there are ten different references which establish the western limits of Dante’s worldview.⁶⁵ The places and descriptions used in these ten references differ greatly: Seville, Morocco, the Ebro river, Calaroga and the straits of Gibraltar are just some of the place names used to indicate the western limits of Dante’s world. Two of these references are used specifically to establish the time in Italy and two others are focused on the western edge of the Mediterranean sea and not the entire globe.⁶⁶ Conversely, the eastern edge of the world is only referred to four times and when the

⁶⁴ Although the correct length of the Mediterranean was calculated by Cordoban Muslim Al-Zarkali in the Toledo tables (1092), surviving evidence suggests that the use of coordinates did not have a direct influence on medieval cartography and the knowledge probably did not circulate widely. Woodward emphasizes that coordinates “were used exclusively to calculate the relative time differences of places required in astrology rather than to aid in locating them on a map or globe (323).”

⁶⁵ *Inferno* 20.124-126, *Purgatorio* 2.1-9, 3.25-27, 4.67-71, 15.1-5, 27.1-6, *Paradiso* 9.85-87, 12.49-51, 27.82-84, 29.101.

⁶⁶ The time in Italy is established in *Pur.* 3.25-27 and 15.1-5, the limits of the Mediterranean in *Par.* 9.82-87 and 27.82-84.

easternmost limit is explicitly named it is always the Ganges river.⁶⁷

The margins and centers which Dante uses to define the parameters of his worldview are much more symbolic than they are geographically accurate. Jerusalem must be centrally located in order to obtain the highest level of significance necessary for its location at the northern end of the axis which connects Adam's sin to Christ's redemption of humanity. Similarly, Rome must be the perfect center of Dante's western hemisphere because of its significance in his political and cultural thought.

The over-estimation of the size of the Mediterranean sea also makes sense in light of the fact that the latest geographical innovations happening at Dante's time in Italy were focused on more accurately mapping and navigating the Mediterranean region. When these innovations influenced maps of the world the resulting world map paid much more attention to the minutiae of Mediterranean coastlines and ports, yet failed to make any significant improvements on representations of the eastern part of the world which were still based on a mix of travelers' accounts and semi-mythical legends. Pietro Vesconte's planisphere (c. 1320, fig. 6) is an image of the entire world created by a cartographer who is known for the extraordinary degree of accuracy with which his navigational charts depict the coastlines of the Mediterranean sea. This accuracy may be incorporated in the lower half of his world map, but does not serve to make his view of the entire world much more accurate than other *mappaemundi* of the period. The red circle indicates the Mediterranean sea and it clearly makes up half the width of the world.

This greater familiarity with the Western limits of the world, as opposed to the East, is

⁶⁷ *Pur.* 2.1-9, 27.1-6 and *Par.* 11.51, 29.101 In *Par.* 29.101 when Dante is establishing the global significance of Christ's death he says that the earthquake was felt by "li spani e li indi." Here he generally uses Spain and India as the farthest regions of the world, but does not identify India specifically by the Ganges river.

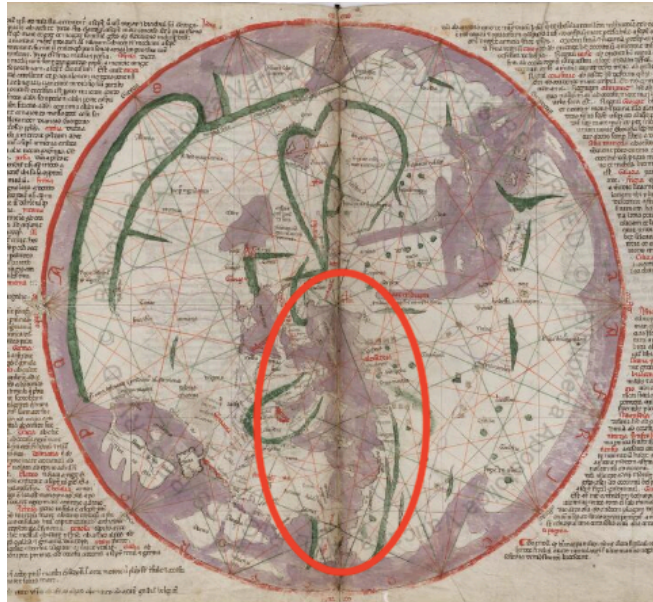


Fig 6. Pietro Vesconte, *Planisphere*, 138v and 139r

also indicated by the nomenclature Dante uses to describe the West. As we have already seen, Dante's choices for indicating the edge of the West are much more varied than his eastern marker which is exclusively the Ganges river. His first indication of the western limit of his world occurs in the first astronomical periphrasis of the *Commedia* which includes a geographical reference rather than purely astronomical descriptions. At the end of *Inferno* 20, Virgil attempts to rush the pilgrim out of the ditch of the diviners, telling him:

Ma vienne omai, ché già tiene 'l confine
d'amendue li emisperi e tocca l'onda
sotto Sobilia Caino e le spine

But let us go; Cain with his thorns already
is at the border of both hemispheres
and there, below Seville, touches the sea.

Inf. 20.124-126

Medieval tradition maintained that the man in the moon was Cain with a bundle of thorns, apparently sent to the moon as punishment for killing his brother. This passage describes the moon setting in the West, as Dante never references the Sun (associated with God) during his journey through the underworld. This image is often explained by commentators as being

described from the perspective of an observer in Jerusalem watching the moon set.⁶⁸

Manfredi Porena raises an important question in his commentary about the assumptions behind this image: how would it be possible for a person standing in Jerusalem to be able to see the moon setting in the sea past Seville?⁶⁹ Porena solves this problem by suggesting that Dante is not describing the experience of an individual standing in Jerusalem watching the moon set, but rather, tracing the connection between Jerusalem and Spain on a navigational chart, following the lines which indicate the various wind directions generated by observation and measurement with a compass. Such a relationship can be seen in Vesconte's planisphere. Figure 7 shows a direct line extending out from Jerusalem and passing directly through Spain. Figure 7.1 shows a close up of the faint word "Sibilia" written almost in the fold of the book.



Fig 6.2 Close up of legend for Sibilia in Pietro Vesconte, *Planisphere*, 138v



Fig. 6.1 Close up of line from Jerusalem to Sibilia in Pietro Vesconte, *Planisphere*, 138v and 139r

⁶⁸ See Singleton & Hollander for this explanation.

⁶⁹ "In che senso, dunque, Dante può dire che la Luna, tramontando per Gerusalemme, si tuffava nel mare delle Colonne?"

The fact that Dante is consulting rhumb lines on navigational charts as he constructs his macroscopic *mappamundi* view of the world is another strong indicator of the fluidity of the boundaries between different forms of geographical representation at his time. While modern viewers often see a marked difference between the haphazard theological world of a *mappamundi* and the ordered and demarcated charts of the Mediterranean, it is clear that contemporary users of these resources did not make rigid distinctions between them.

Dante also indicates Seville as the last geographical reference point of the West, directly across from Ceuta, as Ulysses narrates his journey out of the Mediterranean and into the open ocean.⁷⁰ In *Purgatorio* 27.3 the western limit is defined as the Ebro river: “cadendo Ibero sotto l’alta Libra” (and Ebro lay beneath high Libra). In *Paradiso* 27 Dante again refers to the “folle volo” of Ulysses past the limits of the Western world:

sì ch’io vedea di là da Gade il varco	so that, beyond Gades, I saw the mad course
folle d’Ulisse, e di qua presso il lito	of Ulysses, and to the East saw the shoreline
nel qual si fece Europa dolce carico	where Europa was sweet burden
	<i>Par.</i> 27. 82-84 (translation mine)

Here the Western limit is defined as “di là da Gade.” This is often translated and glossed as signifying Cadiz, however, Mary Ackworth Orr in 1910 argued in *Dante and the Early Astronomers* that here Dante is referring to the “Gades Insulae,” islands upon which Hercules mythically constructed his pillars, referred to by Paulus Orosius in his *Historiarum Adversum Paganos*.⁷¹ He describes the western limits of the world:

⁷⁰ da la man destra mi lasciai Sibilia	upon my right, I had gone past Seville,
da l’altra già m’avea lasciata Setta.	and on the left, already passed Ceuta
	<i>Inf.</i> 26.110-111

⁷¹ See Orr, 340. This is also evidenced by Dante’s reference to the passage from Orosius in the *Quaestio* (see note above).

The Western Ocean forms the boundary of Europe in Spain at the very point where the Pillars of Hercules stand near the Gades Islands and where the Ocean tide comes into the straits of the Tyrrhenian Sea.⁷²

Although the majority of commentaries and translations refer to the reference in verse 82 as the city in Spain, I believe that it is important to return to the understanding espoused by Orr. From a geographical perspective it makes more sense for the pillars of Hercules, in the Straits of Gibraltar, to indicate the marker of the place that Ulysses has gone beyond, rather than the city of Cadiz which is north of the straits and therefore would not have been directly passed by Ulysses on his southward journey. Considering the high level of specificity employed in describing this journey, which will be further described in chapter three, it is unlikely that Dante would have relied on an inaccurate marker like Cadiz.⁷³

The most surprising geographical point used to indicate the far west is the reference to “Calaroga.” In *Paradiso* 12 Dante is describing the biography of St. Dominic, who was born in the city of Calaruega in Spain. However, rather than just mentioning this as a fact he begins by establishing the western location of the city: “In quella parte ove surge ad aprire/ Zefiro dolce” (In that part of the West where gentle zephyr rises [*Par* 12.46-7]). He then goes on to describe the specific location:

⁷² Europae in Hispania occidentalis oceanus terminus est, maxime ubi apud Gades insulas Herculis columnae uisuntur et Tyrrheni maris faucibus oceani aestus inmittitur (translation Irving Woodworth Raymond).

⁷³ This passage in *Paradiso* 27 is also important to consider in light of how Dante defines the western limits of his world, because even the eastern reference, the shore from which Europa was taken, is merely the eastern limit of the Mediterranean sea. His final glance down at the earth before transitioning from the human to the divine, only takes in the part of the world between Phoenicia (Asia Minor) on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean and Spain on the western edge of the sea.

non molto lungi al percuoter de l'onde
dietro a le quali, per la lunga foga,
lo sol talvolta ad ogne uom si nasconde

not far from the pounding waves beyond which
the sun, having finished his long course,
sometimes hides himself from human sight

Par. 12.49-51 (translation Hollander)

While in *Inferno* 20 Dante had described the moon setting past Seville, here he depicts the sun setting off the shore of Calaroga. However, the city of Calaruega is at least 300 kilometers from the coast. Chiavacci Leonardi explains that it is possible that Dante did not have accurate geographical information, or that he has finessed the details to make them fit within his larger geographical project.⁷⁴ Porena maintains that Dante's depiction of the sunset off the coast of Spain functions similarly to the moon setting past Seville in *Inferno* 20, in the sense that it traces not the actual experience of a person observing the occurrence but the understanding of a person considering the path of the celestial body on a chart of the Mediterranean.⁷⁵

Here again we see an example of the poet using all of the geographical information at his disposal in order to make a poetic and theological assertion about the nature of the world. In the case of the location of Rome we have seen evidence that Dante was willing to prioritize the metaphorical over the geographical. However, in the examples of Seville and Calaruega we see the poet creating a metaphorical image by utilizing a high degree of geographical specificity. This passage from *Paradiso* 12 is not just significant because of the improbability of using Calaruega as a marker for the limits of the Western land, but also due to its relationship to the preceding canto. Dante is so focused on establishing the far western origins of St. Dominic, because he had made the opposite assertion in *Paradiso* 11 about the Eastern connection to St.

⁷⁴ "Calaroga si trova in realtà a più di 300 chilometri dalla costa, ma Dante poteva non avere sicure notizie geografiche o, se le aveva, forzare liberamente i dati a suo vantaggio."

⁷⁵ "anche qui Dante fa rappresentante di tutta l'umanità Gerusalemme, per la quale al solstizio estivo il Sole tramonta nelle onde del golfo di Guascogna, nel senso tutto ideale."

Francis. These two *canti* are intricately intertwined in a number of ways and the juxtaposition of the saints' birthplaces is just one of these features.⁷⁶ However, the inversion of the stories of these two important figures is particularly visible in the description of their geographical origins. While Dominic was associated with the setting of the sun, Francis is connected to its rising:

<p>Di questa costa, là dov' ella frange più sua rattezza, nacque al mondo un sole, come fa questo talvolta di Gange.</p>	<p>From this hillside, where it abates its rise, a sun was born into the world, much like this sun when it is climbing from the Ganges.</p>
--	---

Par. 11.49-51

The association of Francis with the sun pre-dates Dante's depiction of him in the *Commedia*. Singleton informs us that at the time the Tuscan pronunciation of Francis' birthplace, Assisi, would have been "Ascesi" which can be understood as meaning "I have risen." Singleton and Chiavacci Leonardi both cite the *Legenda sancti Francis* of Bonaventure which cites Apocalypse 7.2: "vidi alterum angelum ascendentem ab ortu solis" (I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun) as describing Francis. In order to associate the rising sun with the saint Dante makes use of the most recognizable reference in the East, the Ganges river. Just as in many other places in the poem the sun rises for Francis from the Ganges and sets for Dominic past Spain.⁷⁷

The East

Although the references to the West have been diverse, the East is consistently identified with the Ganges. This difference in treatment can be explained by the fact that Dante has much

⁷⁶ See Barolini (1992), 217 for Rhetorical Breakdown of the Eulogies in *Par.* 11 and 12.

⁷⁷ The relationship of Francis to the East and Dominic to the West is also important for their missionary activities. Francis was known for his efforts to convert the Sultan and his subjects from Islam: "ne la presenza del soldan superba/ predicò Cristo e li altri che 'l seguìro" (within the presence of the haughty Sultan, he preached of Christ and those who followed him [*Par.* 11. 101-102]). In the exact same verses of *Paradiso* 12 we hear of Dominic's efforts during the Albigensian Crusade to eliminate the Cathar Heresy spreading in Europe: "l'impeto suo, più vivamente quivi/ dove le resistenze eran più grosse." (his impetus, with greatest force, struck where the thickets of the heretics offered the most resistance. [*Par.* 12. 101-102]).

more geographical and cultural familiarity with Spain, its various cities and famous inhabitants, than he does with the Eastern region where the Ganges is located. The Eastern edge of Dante's world is almost exclusively identified with the Ganges river, and this identification is only made three times in passages that we have already discussed (*Purgatorio* 2, *Purgatorio* 27 and *Paradiso* 11). Unlike the references to the West which are varied and often have important cultural or historical significance, the Ganges is referred to as a generally accepted spatial marker of the East. As we will see later in this section, the spatial significance of the Ganges is distinguished from the cultural significance of the Indus river in *Paradiso* 19. This distinction serves to underscore the purely geographical use of the Ganges in all of Dante's references.⁷⁸

The only time when the poet refers to the Eastern edge of the world without specifically naming the Ganges is in *Paradiso* 29. Here Dante is referring to the eclipse which was said to have occurred when Christ was crucified: "però a li Spani e a l'Indi / come a' Giudei tale eclissi rispuose" (not only Jews, but Spaniards, Indians, too, saw that eclipse, [*Par.* 29.101-102]). By referring to the Spaniards and the Indians the poet is still calling to mind the farthest reaches of the earth, just as the Jews refers to those living in Jerusalem at the time of Christ's crucifixion. This serves as the final reference of the poem which reminds us of the East-west axis of Dante's world which stretches from Spain to India and locates Jerusalem prominently in the center on the basis of the importance of Christ's crucifixion.

None of Dante's contemporaries would have been expected to have precise and correct information about the Easternmost regions of the world. Their confusion and misinformation are

⁷⁸ Schildgen conflates these two markers in her chapter "Dante and the Indus: The Salvation of Pagans" arguing that the Indus is used "as a literary topos for the Eastern extremity of the earth (92)." As has been shown, however, it is always the Ganges which is used to indicate the Eastern extremity. The Indus river is only referred to in *Paradiso* 19 and there has a purely cultural significance.

clearly visible on *mappaemundi* of the time and even in the centuries to follow.⁷⁹ While Dante may not evidence a greater knowledge of eastern geography than his contemporaries, his worldview is also striking for its marked lack of the fantastic creatures and marvelous races which usually filled the otherwise blank Eastern sections of *mappaemundi*. The Hereford and Ebstorf maps are quite explicit in their insistence on strange and fabulous creatures and humans at the farthest reaches of the earth.⁸⁰ Such stories also circulated through written works which were based on a combination of classical sources and travelers' reports.

One popular source of information on the East was the legends of Alexander. These were said to originate in an apocryphal Greek work translated into Latin as *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem, magistrum suum, de itinere suo et de situ Indiae*. Dante gestures at his knowledge of these myths in *Inferno* 14 when he compares the punishment of the sodomites to a legend about Alexander the Great and his army being rained upon by flames in India:

Quali Alessandro in quelle parti calde
d'India vide sopra 'l sūo stuolo
fiamme cadere infino a terra salde,

per ch'ei provide a scalpitar lo suolo
con le sue schiere, acciò che lo vapore
mei si stingueva mentre ch'era solo

Just like the flames that Alexander saw
in India's hot zones, when fires fell,
intact and to the ground, on his battalions,

for which—wisely—he had his soldiers trample
the soil to see that every fire was spent
before new flames were added to the old...

Inf. 14.31-36

However, the main detail that Dante gives of this story, the rain of fire, is not to be found in any of the standard sources of this legend—which relate the common version that Alexander and his army were caught in a snowstorm. Commentators have noted that Dante's version of this story

⁷⁹ Fra Mauro (c. 1450) questions the veracity of the Gog and Magog myth but still includes them on his map. Waldseemüller (c. 1507) is the first to name the newly discovered America but also includes legendary peoples and places (see Gow, 407-410).

⁸⁰ See Westrem for details on the Hereford map's depiction of the East.

probably reflects his adherence to *De Meteoris* of Albertus Magnus, who uses the version with falling fire as an example of igneous vapors.⁸¹ It is interesting to note that what could be considered Dante's most explicit reference to stories of the East does not come from a collection of legends or images, but from a scientific treatise which merely uses the episode as an example of a natural phenomenon. The fact of the story taking place in India is also secondary to the imagery of the rain of fire which is central to the punishment depicted in this circle of hell.⁸²

While the above example was one of multi-tiered misquotation, it is also true that many of these ideas were circulating through a variety of sources in a way which made them a part of the shared cultural knowledge of the age. For example, it has been observed that the description of Geryon in *Inferno* 17 bears a strong similarity to the *manticore* described in Pliny's *Natural History*, reported by Solinus and Brunetto Latini and named *morintomorion* by Albertus Magnus. Dante's Geryon is described:

La faccia sua era faccia d'uom giusto
 Tanto benigna avea di fuor la pelle
 E d'un serpente tutto l'altro fusto;
 Due branche avea pilose insin l'ascelle

The face he wore was that of a just man,
 so gracious was his features' outer semblance
 and all his trunk, the body of a serpent;
 he had two paws, with hair up to the armpits
Inf. 17.10-13

Pliny's manticore is described "facie et auriculus hominis, oculis glaucis, colore sanguineo, corpore leonis, cauda scorpionis modo spicula infigentem" (face and ears of a human, grey eyes,

⁸¹ Singleton highlights the fact that Albertus is the only medieval source to confuse the substance which was falling on the army (Pseudo-Callisthenes, Archpriest Leo and Quilichinus de Spoleto all describe snowfall). He also highlights Dante's use of the word "vapore" in the passage, signalling his familiarity with the passage in *De Meteoris* rather than the traditional Latin sources of the legend.

⁸² Schildgen points out that Alexander's journey in India complements Ulysses' journey past the Western limits of the known world and that this pair serves as the *in malo* example of the positive relationship established between Francis' eastern and Dominic's western origins. (100) However, this parallel overlooks the difference between the perfect balance struck in the depictions of Francis and Dominic compared to the unequal importance of this one reference to Alexander compared to the topos of transgression which Ulysses' journey creates within the poem.

color of blood, body of a lion, tail of a scorpion with which it stings).⁸³ The tradition also identified this creature as an “animal fraudulentus” which also concurs with Dante’s use of the creature in his *Inferno*, described as: “quella sozza imagine di froda” (that filthy effigy of fraud [*Inf.* 17. 7]).⁸⁴ The foreignness of Geryon and his connection to distant marvelous things is also evinced in the comparison of his decorated flanks to “drappi tartari e turchi” (Tartar and Turkish fabrics [*Inf.* 17.17]) which are important to note for the purpose they serve in signaling distance from Europe. Despite these similarities between Dante’s Geryon and the fabulous mantichore, there are certainly many reasons for Dante’s inclusion of the animal in his hell and his masterful use of it goes far beyond copying an image possibly described in a bestiary. However, it is another important instance of a connection between Dante’s depiction of his fictional afterlife and medieval representations of fabulous legends about the world beyond Europe.⁸⁵

Similar references to mythical and fantastic creatures are made in *Inferno* 24 where the bolgia features horrible serpents whose embrace turns the sinners to dust. In describing the creatures which populate this circle of hell Dante declares that they far surpass those known in Libya, Ethiopia and Arabia such as the “chelidri, iaculi e faree...e cencri con anfisibena” (chelydri, jaculi, cenchres with amphisbaena, pareae [*Inf.* 24.86-7]). Here he is specifically referring to the list of serpents among the plagues of Libya named in Lucan’s *Pharsalia*,⁸⁶ although similar creatures are described by Pliny and Solinus as well. Chiavacci

⁸³ Nat. hist. VIII XXXI 30.

⁸⁴ Nat. hist. XXX X 27.

⁸⁵ Schildgen identifies Cerberus (*Inferno* 7) as related to legendary Cynocephalus and the punishment of the diviners (*Inferno* 20) with their heads on backwards as similar to legends of the Antipodeans (37).

⁸⁶ Phars. IX, 711-14, 719-21.

Leonardi calls our attention to the fact the Dante has chosen to include these strange and frightening names as a way to heighten the reader's experience of his fictional invention.⁸⁷ This all serves to show that Dante did have a familiarity with the materials and information circulating which engaged with the strange and distant corners of the world from a mythical perspective. In these instances we see his admission of source material or a clearly defined line of connection which helps us to understand how such imagery came into the vocabulary of the *Commedia*. However, there are also interesting moments in which the connection is far less explicit, and yet the imagery and ideas suggest Dante's awareness of other myths circulating at his time.

Among the monstrous races described in Pliny's *Natural History* are the Anthropophagi, cannibals who are specifically noted for drinking from human skulls.⁸⁸ This bears a striking resemblance to the punishment of Count Ugolino as he gnaws on the skull of his enemy Archbishop Ruggieri.⁸⁹ Certainly, Ugolino's punishment in hell is also meant to reflect the common belief that he cannibalized his own children after they were locked up in the Torre della Muda.⁹⁰ However, while the reasons for the depiction are different from those reported by Pliny or the *mappaemundi* tradition, the effect of shock and horror is still achieved. Friedman points out that Pliny describes a number of races which are peculiar specifically for their dietary habits, suggesting that strange diets can be just as horrendous as disfigured bodies (27).

⁸⁷ "A lui interessa soltanto suscitare alla fantasia, con quegli strani e paurosi nomi in elenco".

⁸⁸ See Friedman, 10.

⁸⁹ e come 'l pan per fame si manduca, così 'l sovràn li denti a l'altro pose là 've 'l cervel s'aggiugne con la nuca	and just as he who's hungry chews his bread one sinner dug his teeth into the other right at the place where brain is joined to nape <div style="text-align: right;"><i>Inf.</i> 32.127-129</div>
---	--

⁹⁰ Dante suggests Ugolino's association with cannibalism through the line "Poscia, più che 'l dolor, poté 'l diugno" (then fasting had more force than grief [*Inf* 33. 75]).

Another example of inverted appetite as a fictional and didactic tool is seen on the terrace of the gluttons on the mountain of purgatory. Those who were overzealous in eating in life are now emaciated and must purge themselves by desiring the apples that they smell without being able to indulge in them. These apple trees have particular relevance given the proximity of the terrace of the gluttonous to the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve first sinned by eating the apple from the forbidden tree. In fact, we are told that the trees these souls smell are grafts from that original tree.⁹¹ However, this description is also shockingly similar to classical descriptions of the Astomi, also known as the Gangines or Apple-Smellers.⁹² It was believed that this race had no mouths and subsisted only on the smells of apples and that too strong of a smell could kill them. The awe medieval readers would have experienced reading of such a race is mirrored in the question Dante asks about the purgation of the gluttonous:

Chi crederebbe che l'odor d'un pomo	Who—if he knew not how—would have believed
sì governasse, generando brama,	that longing born from odor of a tree,
e quel d'un'acqua, non sappiendo como?	odor of water, could reduce souls so?

Pur. 23.34-36

I would like to make the suggestion, which I have not found in any other source, that Dante has been influenced by the myth of the Astomi which was reported in various texts throughout the Middle Ages and that he then inverted it “in malo.” While in Pliny’s original the smell of apples is generative of nutrition, in Dante’s purgatorial version the smell is generative of an emaciating desire. However, both produce a strong effect and invite the reader to contemplate what it means to consume and what types of consumption are acceptable.

⁹¹ legno è più su che fu morso da Eva,
e questa pianta si levò da esso.

there is a tree above from which Eve ate
and from that tree above, this plant was raised.

Pur. 24.116-117

⁹² See Friedman, 11.

These connections are not meant to imply that the entirety of Dante's motivation for the imagery of *Inferno* 14, 17, 24, 33 and *Purgatorio* 23, 24 can be traced exclusively back to the tradition of depicting the world beyond Europe. There are multiple reasons for Dante to choose these punishments and these particular references. However, it is certain that these popular myths and legends were a part of Dante's cultural consciousness and that his awareness of them would have colored the choices that he made in constructing his poem. The aim here is not to identify the sole source of Dante's particular choices, but instead to create a richer understanding of the historical circumstances in which he was writing and to draw out the significance that his choices had on the larger worldview of his poem. Friedman argues that the myths of these fabulous races were so popular because they were necessary. He states:

Their appeal to medieval men was based on such factors as fantasy, escapism, delight in the exercise of the imagination, and—very important—fear of the unknown. If the monstrous races had not existed, it is likely that people would have created them. (24)

He continues by explaining that in some way many of these races did actually “exist” and that what sound like elaborate legends can often be explained by accounting for the tales of confused travelers which became only more elaborate as they were passed on. For instance, the myth of the Apple-smellers could possibly be traced to the practices of a group of mountain dwellers in the Himalayas who smell onions to ward off elevation sickness (25).

In many ways Dante's poem can be seen to do much of the same work as the medieval legends about the edges of the earth. The fantasy and imagination are certainly present, as well as the fear of the unknown which would assail any Christian reader contemplating the possibility that any of these descriptions of the afterlife might bear some truth. There is also a factor of familiarity in the fact that Dante takes well-known people, either from his own time or from

within his tradition, and exaggerates what was known of their faults or proclivities to an elaborate, and often horrifying, degree. It may have been whispered among the people of Pisa that Ugolino ate his children, but Dante clearly depicts him gnawing on a human skull.

What is most crucial for our understanding of the stakes of these choices, is the fact that Dante has effectively removed the association of the monstrous and the marvelous from the farthest reaches of the globe. He has created conditions which I like to call “equal opportunity monstrosity.” It is not necessary to live in India to be a cannibal or have strange physical deformities or to live among fabulous beasts. One need only sin in order to inhabit a land of myth and legend. Medieval myths about peoples with strange dietary, sexual and cultural practices are said to have been necessary in order for medieval readers to project their fears onto an other which could be vilified without repercussions. Dante has changed the metric for this projection of fear from a geographical distance to what could be called a dimensional distance. His monsters and marvelous punishments are separated from his readers only by death. Other than that they are perfectly recognizable. There is no need for the poet to have recourse to the standard monstrous races of his day, as he has created his own model for projecting human fears and desires onto a terrible and perverted form. And in doing so he has relocated the site of monstrosity from the East to the afterlife and encapsulated it in his larger view of salvation and damnation.

This is not the only significant change that the poet makes to the regions of the world which were very little known but much discussed in the Middle Ages. The feature of Dante’s east which is most striking in comparison to the *mappaemundi* of his period is its hydrography. The poet has fundamentally changed the geography of the eastern regions and, if mapped, Dante’s

east would appear vastly different from contemporary *mappaemundi*, which almost exclusively feature the Earthly Paradise at the Far Eastern edge of the world. This Earthly Paradise is sometimes seen floating as an island (see fig. 4.1), or separated from the “real” world by a wall of fire.⁹³ However, this separation is metaphorical rather than completely physical and it was truly believed that the four rivers of the Earthly Paradise made their way out into the world. Alongside the easily identifiable Tigris and Euphrates, Genesis also names the Gihon and the Phison.⁹⁴ Some traditions identified these two as the Ganges and the Indus while others identified the Gihon as the Nile and debated whether the Phison might be the Danube, the Ganges or the Indus.⁹⁵ Although Dante does make references to the Eastern rivers which were associated with the rivers of the Earthly Paradise he removes their association with Eden, as necessitated by his relocation of Eden to a solitary mountain in the Southern Hemisphere.

The poet gestures at the novelty of his intervention at the end of *Purgatorio* when he describes the rivers he has invented through the eyes of the pilgrim who mistakes them for the Tigris and Euphrates:

Dinanzi ad esse Ëufratès e Tigri, veder mi parve uscir d’una fontana,	In front of them I seemed to see Euphrates and Tigris issuing from one same spring
	<i>Pur.</i> 33.112-113

The poet then has the pilgrim naively ask Beatrice how this is possible:

“O luce, o gloria de la gente umana, che acqua è questa che qui si dispiega	“O light, o glory of the human race, what water is this, flowing from one source
--	---

⁹³ It is interesting to note that the final terrace of Dante’s purgatory is also separated from the rest of the mountain by a wall of fire. While this fire represents the burning desires of the lustful it also practically separates the Earthly Paradise (just beyond the terrace of the lustful) from the lower parts of the mountain.

⁹⁴ “A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah...The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.” *Genesis* 2:10-14

⁹⁵ See Kominko, 146 and Baumgärtner, 311.

da un principio e sé da sé lontana?”

and then becoming distant from itself?”

Pur. 33.115-117

Beatrice tells the pilgrim to ask Matelda, who responds in annoyance that she already explained the details of the rivers of the Earthly Paradise. The rivers on the top of the mountain were first explained to the pilgrim when he expressed his confusion at finding rivers and breezes in a place where Statius has just told him that no meteorological events can occur (*Pur.* 21.40-57). Matelda explains that these are not meteorological events, but rather supernatural phenomena; the breeze is caused by the movement of the *primum mobile* and the waters are restored, not from clouds, but from a “fontana salda e certa” (pure and changeless fountain [*Pur.* 28.124]) which always retains as much water as it pours. She then goes on to name them: “Quinci Letè; così da l’altro lato/ Eünoè si chiama” (To one side, it is Lethe; on the other, Eunoe [*Pur.* 28. 130-131]). Lethe is the river which cleanses the purged soul of bad memories, while Eunoe restores memories of good deeds. The poet has already hinted at the location of Lethe in *Inferno* 14 when the pilgrim mistakenly looks for it in hell.⁹⁶ Eunoe is a Dantean invention, named with a combination of two Greek words meaning good, and mind or memory. The pilgrim’s confusion in *Purgatorio* 33 is the poet’s way of gesturing at the novelty of the rivers in his Earthly Paradise and his knowledge that the Tigris and Euphrates were generally held to have supernatural sources in the Garden of Eden located somewhere in the East.

Although our poet seems to playfully call attention to the fact that he has essentially rewritten the Bible, the debate surrounding the location of the Earthly Paradise and where its four

⁹⁶ Letè vedrai, ma fuor di questa fossa,
là dove vanno l’anime a lavarsi
quando la colpa pentuta è rimossa.

You shall see Lethe, but past this abyss,
there where spirits go to cleanse themselves
when their repented guilt is set aside.

Inf. 14.136-138

rivers might be found was taken quite seriously. Historians of cartography frequently relate the tale of Columbus, who, while exploring the New World in 1498, stumbled upon a river delta and apparently earnestly believed that he had come upon the four rivers of paradise.⁹⁷

Just as with his choice to treat monstrosity differently than his contemporaries, here it is also possible to see a number of motivations for the poet to recreate the geography of the East and the Earthly Paradise. In the section on Jerusalem we have already explored the significance Dante ascribed to the location of Eden at the Antipodes of the place where Christ was crucified and the importance of tracing this connection through the physical body of the fallen Satan. The movement of Eden to the southern hemisphere necessarily requires a disconnect from the four rivers typically considered to link the Earthly Paradise to the world of lived experience. Again, what we are interested in tracing here is not the motivations for Dante's choice to ignore geographical convention, but rather to better understand the ramifications of this new geography for his entire worldview.

By moving the Earthly Paradise to the top of mount purgatory in the southern hemisphere, and thereby disconnecting it from the Tigris and Euphrates, Dante has in effect recuperated the East as a fully-fledged part of the real world. Rivers which had previously been of interest to medieval scholars only for their mythical source in the Garden of Eden can now be understood as simple hydrographic features of a region of the world which is less familiar than Europe but just as real. Similarly, populations which were frequently depicted as dog-headed, incapable of speech or physically disfigured, no longer need to bear the burden of European fear and fantasy. Once the Astomi have been relocated to purgatory and the Anthropophagi to the

⁹⁷ See Woodward, 328.

depths of hell, it is possible to consider the inhabitants of the East simply as people. It is precisely the combination of the relocation of the monstrous to the afterlife and the Earthly Paradise to the Southern Hemisphere which creates the conditions under which Dante can earnestly wonder about the fate of a simple man living near the banks of the Indus river.

We encounter Dante's query about the possible salvation of an inhabitant of India in *Paradiso* 19. The pilgrim has just encountered the Eagle of Justice and takes the opportunity to raise a question on the justice of salvation which he intimates has been bothering him for a long time.⁹⁸ In true divine fashion, the Eagle already knows exactly the doubt which the pilgrim will express and states the question for him:

Ché tu dicevi: “un uom nasce a la riva
De l’Indo, e quivi non è chi ragioni
Di Cristo né chi legga né chi scriva;

For you would say: ‘A man is born along
the shoreline of the Indus River; none
is there to speak or teach or write of Christ

E tutti i suoi voleri e atti buoni
Sono, quanto ragione umana vede,
Sanza peccato in vita o in sermoni

And he, as far as human reason sees,
in all he seeks and all he does is good:
there is no sin within his life or speech.

Muore non battezzato e senza fede:
Ov’è questa giustizia che ‘l condanna?
Ov’è la colpa sua, se ei non crede?”

And that man dies unbaptized, without faith.
Where is this justice then that condemns him?
Where is his sin if he does not believe?

Par. 19.70-78

The importance of this passage for understanding Dante's worldview cannot be underscored enough. Previously in the poem he has dramatized the question of the justice of salvation through

⁹⁸ Sapete come attento io m'apparechio
ad ascoltar; sapete qual è quello
dubbio che m'è digiun cotanto vecchio.”

You know how keenly I prepare myself
to listen, and you know what is that doubt
which caused so old a hungering in me.

Par. 19.31-33

the pilgrim's close relationship with his damned guide Virgil.⁹⁹ The litany of names of souls in Limbo which we encounter both in *Inferno* 4 as well as in *Purgatorio* 22 pathologizes the plight of these virtuous and important figures who are eternally suffering due to their lack of baptism. He also gestures at the possibility of rewriting this narrative in his revelation of the salvation of the classical figures of Statius, Cato, Trajan as well as the Trojan Ripheus in *Paradiso* 20. However, the question posed by the Pilgrim in *Paradiso* 19 is particularly crucial because it takes into account something which had not previously been relevant: geography.¹⁰⁰

We cannot understand the truly radical nature of the question that he poses without the context of representations of the East and its inhabitants made by Dante's contemporaries. When looking at a map of India made at Dante's time, one would be hard pressed to find an image of a normal man anywhere near the banks of the Indus river. Since mapmakers knew so little of the region they generally filled the space with monsters, mythical races and the occasional biblical or classical reference. Up until the fifteenth century they continued to depict the Garden of Eden in the Far East and to debate which eastern rivers fed into the rivers of paradise. This emphasis on the presence of a spiritual otherworld in the Far East forecloses the possibility of recognizing that European ignorance of the East might simply stem from lack of information. When the Ganges river is said to feed into the Garden of Eden the details of that river and its eastern end are theologically prescribed to be unknowable. The people living so near to such an un-earthly place must also be presumed to be strange and unknowable. Such a fantastical approach to depicting

⁹⁹ See Barolini (1990), 154: "Dante, like the heavenly eagle, was obsessively concerned with the justice of damning those who did not know God...He incarnates his concern in the figure of Vergil...(Another way of saying this is that Dante tries to generate his intellectual passion for justice in his readers through his handling of the figure of Vergil.)"

¹⁰⁰ See Barolini (2011), 189-193.

the East makes it hard to imagine a medieval user of the map asking the same question that Dante poses so poignantly in his *Paradiso*. However, by removing the semi-mythical status afforded to almost every river in the East by some Christian thinker believing to have found the “true” rivers of paradise, Dante represents an East which may be less known than the West but is no longer practically beyond the realm of lived experience. It is this shift in geographical understanding which allows him to think about the soul of an Indian man in the same way that he conceptualizes the lack of salvation for pre-Christian western poets and philosophers.

This chapter has explored the various ways in which Dante engages with the geographical knowledge of his day. By situating his geography alongside the ideas espoused by his contemporaries, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the significance of his choices. While Dante’s centrally located Jerusalem may accord with many of the most well-known maps of his day, by understanding the history of mapping Jerusalem we can better situate Dante’s use of the city within a long and complex tradition. We have seen the differences between how the poem engages with the West versus the East, and although the poet mobilizes more diverse and specific references to the West he is also notable for his choice not to resort to the popular legendary and marvelous tales of the East. By situating the marvelous in the afterlife and relocating the Earthly Paradise to the Southern Hemisphere, Dante has created a view of the world which can conceptualize the East as a site of lived experience.

These changes have significant effects on the understanding of the East within the poem. However, the invention of a mountain of purgatory at the antipodes of Jerusalem, created by Lucifer’s fall from grace, is a significant literary invention in its own right. Dante’s invention of the purgatorial mountain, its terraces and the placement of the Earthly Paradise at the top is

singular in medieval cosmography. The poet first introduces his invention of a mountain in the southern hemisphere in *Inferno* 26, before his reader has been officially introduced to his concept of purgatory. Although as readers we are unaware of its significance, it is in the story of Ulysses when we first hear about this southern mountain which no living being can approach, until Dante. As we will see in the next chapter, the fateful journey of Ulysses is relevant for much more than including our first glimpse of Dante's mountain of purgatory. In characteristically Dantean fashion the narrative of the ancient Greek sinner contains important geographical references and indicates the poet's familiarity with the other important cartographical sources of his age, the portolan or navigational charts.

Chapter 3.

Charting Dante's Mediterranean: Ulysses, Navigation, and *Portolani*

ma misi me per l'alto mare aperto

Inferno 26.100

The previous chapter considered Dante's world view on a macroscopic level, looking at the margins and center set by the poet as they related to the tradition of medieval *mappaemundi* which represented the entirety of the cosmos including man's relationship to God. This chapter will consider ways in which Dante's writing evidences an understanding of the more local geography of the Mediterranean, the representation of which was taken up at the end of the thirteenth century by the emerging field of navigational charts or *portolani*. This analysis will begin with a historicized reading of *Inferno* 26 which uncovers the relevant geographical and historical information underlying Ulysses' description of his ill-fated journey. From there we will see other instances when Dante's geographical references are cartographically informed and give us an insight into how he interacted with the developing navigational technology of his day. Finally, we will go deeper into an exploration of the social and cultural stakes of these new forms of knowledge production and uncover specifically how Dante's writings are situated within a society which was vastly changing as a result of these new forms of technology.

Although these chapters distinguish between the large-scale view of the world and more local geographical information it is important to recognize that the two ways of representing the world were always interconnected. Navigational charts developed out of the same society which was producing theological world maps, and over time began to incorporate some of the same representational approaches and techniques. Similarly, although *mappaemundi* continued to be

produced for more than a century after the appearance of portolan charts, their production was informed by the new ways of viewing the world introduced by the navigational tradition.

Whereas the *mappaemundi* discussed in the previous chapter were an established reference point well before Dante began writing, it is harder to be certain of the level of awareness of these new charts which were developing during the poet's active period.

The difficulty in understanding how familiar these charts would have been to Dante and his contemporaries comes from the fact that even scholars of the history of cartography cannot agree on when these charts first began to be used, how quickly they became widespread and how much non-specialist awareness there would have been of this technology. The chronology of portolan charts' development has always stymied scholars of cartography and they continue to debate exactly when navigational charts appeared in the Mediterranean region and how they developed and spread. Various hypotheses have suggested a rediscovery of Roman mapping technology, or a continuing tradition whose earlier examples have disappeared from the historical record.¹⁰¹ Although eventually the technology of portolan charts was used in creating atlases and ornate world maps meant for display, all of the earliest extant examples which have survived clearly show that they were created for navigation. This focus on function and the exigencies of shipboard use makes it very likely that significantly more charts existed at the end of the thirteenth century than have survived.¹⁰² However, without being able to study a sizeable collection of the genre it is hard for scholars to ascertain where they were being produced, who would have interacted with them and how widespread knowledge would have been of their

¹⁰¹ See Harvey (esp. 283), Campbell (esp. 371) & Puchades Chapter 6.

¹⁰² Puchades discovered records which indicated that old navigational charts were sold to be used as parchment for other documents, showing that in themselves the charts were not seen as valuable if they were not explicitly being used for navigational purposes.

existence beyond navigational circles

The oldest surviving portolan chart, the *Carta Pisana*, has all the features of a basic chart meant to help a navigator travel between important ports in the Mediterranean. These features are in keeping with what we know of the early period, and it is presumed to date from the late thirteenth century (1275-1300). This time period also corresponds to what is considered the earliest documentary reference to a navigational chart in a chronicle dated to around 1270. This reference tells the story of the voyage of King Louis IX to Aigues Mortes during which his vessel was forced to take refuge from a storm. In order to assure the king that land is close, the chronicle reports that the captain showed him a “*mappamundi*” which indicated their position and its relation to land. The next documented reference is from 1294 when the Aragonese crown claimed restitution for a vessel taken by pirates and lists three “*mappamundi*” as being included in the ship’s effects.¹⁰³ It is often argued that the simplicity with which these references are made indicates a greater amount of commonality and awareness than the scanty remaining evidence might suggest. By the period of the first extant signed and dated navigational chart (Pietro Vesconte’s chart of 1311), it is presumed that the use of charts was a fully established and known practice throughout the Mediterranean. Vesconte is considered to have been the first professional chart-maker in Europe, and the level of accuracy he achieves as well as the possibility for him to establish an atelier as a chart-maker indicates that by 1311 the genre has reached an advanced stage of development and dissemination.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ It was quite common for the term *mappamundi* to be used for any representation of the world (even without images). It was not until much later than scholars used the term to refer specifically to the theologically inspired maps of the world and not charts incorporating navigational technology.

¹⁰⁴ Vesconte’s production has come down to us in the 1311 chart as well as a 1313 atlas, two 1318 atlases, three atlases dated 1321, a 1325 atlas, and a 1327 chart.

Due to the limited number of extant Italian charts from Dante's time, it can be hard to know the level of technological specificity to which he might have been exposed as well as the geographical features which would have been included (or not) on northern Italian charts of the early fourteenth century. This is a question which has been of interest to Dante scholars for some time and we will see that the identification of his potential geographical sources has been discussed in detail since the end of the nineteenth century. However, less emphasis has been placed on understanding how awareness of these sources might have affected his poetic choices. Generally the conversation has been premised on the question of how modern or medieval the poet could be considered based on his level of geographical knowledge. In order to understand this specific focus taken by Dante studies, it is necessary to have a deeper understanding of how the field of the history of cartography has understood the importance of the navigational charts and their place in the larger history of western cartographical development.

Historically, scholars have focused on when and how portolan charts reappeared in the Mediterranean region because they were regarded as indicators of the return of scientific reason over theological dogma in the field of geography. As we have seen in previous chapters, Raymond Beazley referred to *mappaemundi* as “the absurdities of dark age mapmaking” and Dante scholar Edward Moore was influenced by this approach to cartography when he portrayed Dante's geography as the product of a generally ignorant society.¹⁰⁵ However, recent scholarship on the history of cartography has begun to challenge this teleological and anachronistic reading of navigational history.¹⁰⁶ The cartographical tradition shows that the technology which

¹⁰⁵ See chapter 1 for discussion of the prejudices against medieval mapmaking evident in Beazley and Moore.

¹⁰⁶ The contributions of Campbell and Morse to *The History of Cartography* series are most notable for establishing and supporting this challenge to teleological readings.

nineteenth-century scholars heralded as the introduction of reason into Western European cartography was not always embraced as superior by medieval chart-makers. While portolan charts continued to improve the accuracy of their coastlines and included more place names as they became relevant to navigation, we do not see evidence of the theological *mappaemundi* simultaneously disappearing. Rather, we see an interesting cross-pollination in which *mappaemundi* take on some of the accuracy achieved by portolan charts, while later navigational charts begin to incorporate a more holistic geographical representation including theological and cosmological views of the world.¹⁰⁷

Any reading of Dante's knowledge of navigational technology must also take into account the fact that his contemporaries would not necessarily have seen reliance on *mappaemundi* as old-fashioned and references to portolan charts as new and exciting. In fact, *mappaemundi* continue to be produced until the mid-fifteenth century and both types of map continue to incorporate references to the Garden of Eden, rivers of paradise, and fantastic creatures and races along the peripheries of the known world.¹⁰⁸ When we highlight the fact that Dante makes no reference to dog-headed Saracens or one-footed sciapods this should not be understood as evidence of his proto-Renaissance worldview, but rather as a specifically Dantean choice within a culture which would continue to propagate these myths for at least two more

¹⁰⁷ This issue is explored by Woodward near the end of his chapter on *mappaemundi* (314-318). He discusses a number of maps largely considered part of the portolan tradition (namely Vesconte's 1321 atlases and the Catalan Atlas of 1375) as relevant to the final stage of *mappaemundi* production.

¹⁰⁸ The 1459 Fra Mauro map is considered the culmination of the *mappaemundi* tradition and although it incorporates many technological innovations from the portolan tradition, and Fra Mauro was a producer of many navigational charts, it still represents a number of myths and legends at the outer edges of the world and owes more of its style to the *mappaemundi* tradition.

centuries.¹⁰⁹ While it is important to understand the level of awareness Dante had of the cartographical knowledge of his time, it is also important to better understand the significance of his references to his first audience. In order to achieve this level of understanding we also need to engage with the various forms of medieval cartography by considering the function they served for their users and not how “accurate” or “realistic” they seem from a modern perspective.

The general trend of Dante scholarship on the poet’s relationship to geography has been predominantly focused on historical, literary and biblical sources of Dante’s knowledge and has not given nearly enough credence to the importance of lived experience. This is where a historicized understanding of the geographical milieu in which Dante was writing can give modern readers a stronger understanding of the ideas and kinds of knowledge which would have been circulating at Dante’s time. Geographer and historian Paolo Revelli takes this argument further in his 1922 work on *L’Italia di Dante*. He specifically illustrates moments in Dante’s text which would have necessitated the consultation of a navigational chart in order to explain the accuracy achieved by the poet. Revelli was not a Dante scholar, but a Genoese historian of cartography and navigational history. Revelli is the first to name specific navigational charts which might share similarities with those consulted by Dante. He highlights specific references and how their points are accurate to charts of the time, compared to earlier *mappaemundi* which represent the same regions differently. These conclusions lead Revelli to assert that Dante’s cartographical knowledge is incredibly sophisticated.¹¹⁰ This is the first work to proclaim Dante’s

¹⁰⁹ Dante’s lack of references to mythical races is further discussed in chapter two. For a deeper discussion on Dante’s unwillingness to blindly follow the stereotypes of his age see Barolini (2011).

¹¹⁰ “l’esame dell’intero contenuto geografico delle opere dantesche ci guida alla conclusione che Dante, anche per le sue conoscenze geografiche, rappresenta degnamente i dotti del tempo” (The examination of the entire geographical contents of Dante’s works leads us to the conclusion that Dante, also for his geographical knowledge, truly represents the most learned of the age, 26).

geography to be among the most erudite of his time, in the face of Moore's assertion that Dante dealt with geography "incidentally only, and not as a specialist" (109). Revelli's contribution is also significant because it contains the first printed edition of Pietro Vesconte's 1321 planisphere (a source which will be discussed later in this chapter for its cultural and ideological significance) and Revelli is insistent that the work of the Genoese cartographer, or something similar, would have been necessary to furnish the poet's erudite references.¹¹¹

The *Enciclopedia Dantesca* also approaches the question of Dante's awareness of "carte geografiche." Osvaldo Baldacci cites Moore and Revelli as sources and also points out the references which seem to require consultation of nautical charts in order to explain their accuracy. As late as 2001, Baldacci published an article titled *Dante lettore di geocarte e portolani* in which he continues to affirm the fact that Dante did indeed have knowledge of contemporary cartography and specifically portolan charts. Generally, the approaches to this question within Dante studies over the course of the twentieth century always refer back to Moore's contribution which so precisely lays out the major geographical references and identifies their medieval sources. Baldacci's *Enciclopedia* entry suggests the Giovanni da Carignano map, which he dates to 1310, just as Revelli suggested Vesconte's 1311 chart. We will never be able to categorically prove which maps Dante may have had access to, however by creating a richer background for understanding how geographical knowledge was used and disseminated at his time we can approximate an appreciation for how navigational charts may have influenced the construction of his world.

More recently, Theodore Cachey Jr.'s essay on "Cosmology, Geography and

¹¹¹ "Dante ebbe probabilmente presenti, se non la carta del Vesconte del 1311, altre carte similari del cartografo genovese" (46).

Cartography” references the relevance of nautical charts to the poet’s world view. Going beyond Revelli’s assertion that Vesconte might have been a source for the poet, Cachey declares that Dante “shows marked affinities to...Pietro Vesconte, who for the first time embedded the empirically based nautical chart of the Mediterranean within a *mappaemundi* scheme” (239).¹¹² Cachey’s work is important for its recognition that a full reading of Dante’s geography must go beyond the simple question of geographical sources and consider fully the environment in which the poet is engaging with geographical ideas.¹¹³ In 2014 he argued:

there is a difference between approaching the theme of Dante and cartography in terms of intellectual history and source criticism, and adopting a hermeneutical attitude that considers Dante’s writing in relation to a general shift in the history of the spatial imagination of Europe that took place during the Duecento and Trecento. (200)

While he recognizes the importance of this mode of reading, his response to the Ulysses episode ultimately reverts to the old model and simply sets a new standard for what makes a “conservative,” arguing that Dante’s geography is “conservative” and “outdated” because it does not include the travels of Marco Polo (1254-1324) or explorations past the Pillars of Hercules. It is Cachey’s contention that Dante chooses to “suppress potentially disturbing or disruptive aspects” (239) which may have threatened the cosmological synthesis of his poem.¹¹⁴ While Cachey has made a number of important contributions to our understanding of how Dante uses geography within his poem, this insistence on measuring Dante’s level of modernity compared to

¹¹² Cachey makes a similar argument in his 2014 essay “Cartographic Dante: A Note on Dante and the Greek Mediterranean”.

¹¹³ The importance of Cachey’s contributions to the study of Dante’s geography has been discussed more fully in chapter one.

¹¹⁴ He makes the same assertion in 2014 insisting that Dante “suppresses the Fortunate-Canary Islands in the West and the Marcopolean discoveries in the East” (199, note 7). For more on the islands just past the pillars of Hercules see Cachey (1995). The question of Dante’s relationship to Atlantic exploration will also be discussed later in this chapter.

his contemporaries rests on the false assumption that newness and innovation was the highest goal of medieval cartographical production.¹¹⁵ This anachronistic reading of Dante's geography as "outdated" fails to fully take into account how geographical knowledge was disseminated and utilized at Dante's time. The first map to include references from the travels of the Polo brothers is the Catalan Atlas of 1375 and Woodward informs us that in general "the narrative of Marco Polo had very little effect on world cartography of the time- certainly much less than the novelty of its geographical information would lead us to expect" (315). In other words, it was not just Dante who did not incorporate Marco Polo's discoveries into his work at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Woodward informs us that no one did (at least in any work that survives to this day).

Ultimately, we will never know to what extent Dante consulted navigational charts and which extant model most closely resembles the model familiar to him and his contemporaries. Considering the vast gulf between the number of charts believed to have been in circulation in the early fourteenth century and the number of surviving charts which we can currently consult for connections to Dante's works, the attempt to identify his specific source material seems a thankless task. However, by following in the path first laid by Revelli, we can see that Dante clearly had a level of geographical knowledge and cartographical understanding to make it worthwhile to pursue a deeper exploration of how this engagement plays out in his works. From this premise this chapter will focus on using an understanding of medieval cartography and navigational technology to illustrate more precisely the milieu in which Dante was working and

¹¹⁵ Cachey's recent contributions have primarily focused on how Dante engages with the geography of Italy. See discussion in chapter one, as well as "La mappa d'Italia in Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio" (2018) and "Cartographic Dante" (2010).

specifically how he related to it.

In order to truly appreciate the significance of Dante's use and awareness of portolan charts, we need to conduct a reading of his references which goes beyond simply asking *what* he knew or not. Rather than being influenced by the focus on "new technologies" and their evidence of a modern world view, we must first recuperate these references by situating them within their historical framework. Once we have historicized Dante's navigational references, we can bring them into conversation with other relevant aspects of his works. These include nautical technology, sailing references and merchant culture.

An Ancient Voyage Along the Trunk Routes of the Medieval Mediterranean

One of the best episodes in the *Commedia* for bringing these issues together is the famous monologue of Ulysses in *Inferno* 26 in which he describes his epic journey from the western shores of Italy to a shipwreck in the Southern Hemisphere. This episode is generally read for its importance in establishing the relationship between Dante the divinely-guided pilgrim and the figure of the transgressive sinner, Ulysses, who is referenced once in each canticle of the poem.¹¹⁶ However, the sinner also makes a number of important nautical, geographical and cartographical references which can be historicized through various lenses. A deeper understanding of the historical information underlying the poetry will help us shed new light on Dante's conception of this fictional voyage, as well as how the references might have been received by his earliest readers.

Dante and his guide encounter the "flame" of Ulysses punished in the eighth pouch of the *Malebolge*, a collection of ten pouches of various sins of fraud which make up the eighth circle

¹¹⁶ Ulysses is named in *Inferno* 26, *Purgatorio* 19 and *Paradiso* 27. For a concise analysis of the critical tradition surrounding this figure see Barolini (2000), 842-847.

of Dante's hell. Ulysses is placed among the fraudulent counselors, whose *contrapasso* is to be enclosed in flames which represent the malicious use of the flames of their genius in life.¹¹⁷

When Virgil introduces Ulysses and his companion Diomedes to the pilgrim he lists two specific sins for which they are punished: "l'agguato del caval" (the horse's fraud [*Inf.* 26. 59]) and "del Palladio" (the Palladium [*Inf.* 26. 63]). This characterization of Ulysses the trickster who stole the Palladium, a large wooden statue of Athena, and invented the deceptive horse which defeated the Trojans, coincides with the negative depiction in Book II of Virgil's *Aeneid*. However, after this initial introduction, Dante's Ulysses departs significantly from the common medieval representations of the famous Greek. Particularly relevant to a geographical and navigational analysis of Ulysses' journey and shipwreck is the fact that Dante has completely invented this ending for the famous Greek.¹¹⁸

While Dante would not have had access to Homer's version of events, there were a number of classical and medieval sources which related various aspects of Ulysses' story and Dante chooses to blend different and opposing versions of the story to create his own unique conclusion. Just as he does in the creation of his purgatory, he crafts a new representation which is particularly suited to his poem and the world he creates within it. The importance of this invented voyage within Dante's world view is evidenced throughout the poem and is underscored in two key moments. First, Dante's mountain of purgatory is first introduced at the end of this canto. This mountain of salvation is Ulysses' last sight before the sea opens up and

¹¹⁷ This is the explanation offered by Chiavacci Leonardi: "quella fiamma che arde in eterno i peccatori è figura della fiamma dell'ingegno di cui essi fecero cattivo uso."

¹¹⁸ See Stanford for more on Dante's invention in comparison to other classical and medieval sources.

swallows his vessel.¹¹⁹ The poet then reminds us of the significance of this voyage in *Paradiso* 27 and as he looks down at the earth from heaven he uses this reference to delimit the western edge of the world.

The introduction of the mount of purgatory at this early point in the narrative serves two important functions. Ulysses' description of "una montagna, bruna" (a mountain, dark [*Inf.* 26.133]) does not specifically identify the mountain as purgatory, although most readers encounter the *Commedia* through the mediation of a commentary which would identify it. A reader without the help of notes is being set up by the poet to recognize in the first canto of *Purgatorio* that the mountain Dante and Virgil have reached must be the same as the only landmass encountered by Ulysses after he crosses into the Southern Hemisphere. At the beginning of his journey Ulysses refers to a number of real geographical locations which he passes as he crosses the Mediterranean. Dante's final inclusion of his fictional mountain at the end of a long line of real references serves to buttress the veracity of this mountain's existence and to erase any distinction between reality and fiction within the geography of the poem.

However, the poet is also using the mountain of purgatory to underscore the difference between his journey, which is permitted to go beyond the limits no man has crossed, and the failed voyage of Ulysses. Within his narration Ulysses admits that he goes beyond the pillars of Hercules, which were erected "acciò che l'uom più oltre non si metta" (that men might heed and never reach beyond [*Inf.* 26.109]). Despite the divine warning not to pass, Ulysses gives a stirring motivational speech which convinces his men to follow him beyond the limits and into

¹¹⁹ quando n'apparve una montagna, bruna
per la distanza, e parvemi alta tanto
quanto veduta non avēa alcuna.

when there rose before us a mountain, dark
because of the distance, and it seemed to me
the highest mountain I had ever seen.

Inf. 26.133-135

the unknown. However, unlike the pilgrim whose journey is willed by God, Ulysses had no permission to cross the bounds set for men and it is this transgression that ends in his shipwreck. Ulysses may catch a glimpse of the mountain of purgatory, but within eight *canti* our pilgrim will be climbing its shores.

Although Ulysses' voyage is a fictional creation of the poet which serves as a transgressive foil to the rightly-guided pilgrim, Dante is careful to inscribe it in the reality of his world's geography. In *Paradiso* 27 the pilgrim looks back for the last time at the earth which has provided so much rich geographical material for the poem and observes:

si ch'io veda di là da Gade il varco folle d'Ulisse, e di qua presso il lito nel qual si fece Europa dolce carco.	so that, beyond Gades, I saw Ulysses' mad course and, to the east, could almost see that shoreline where Europa was sweet burden <i>Par. 27.82-84</i>
---	--

As is often the case in the poem, Dante depicts his world stretching from the Pillars of Hercules, famously erected on the Gades Islands, in the west to the shore of Asia Minor in the East.¹²⁰ However, he uses the course of the voyage of Ulysses to delimit the western edge of his world, despite the fact that a ship's course leaves no permanent trace and he himself has invented this voyage (unlike the location of the rape of Europa which was an established myth).¹²¹

In *Inferno* 26 Dante uses the monologue of Ulysses to introduce the reader to his invented mountain of purgatory in the southern hemisphere. In *Paradiso* 27 he draws the western limits of the world with the voyage of Ulysses which he himself has created. The circular nature of Dante's use of these fictional geographical reference points, which are fundamental in the world view of his poem, gives us an insight into how he seamlessly constructs his fictional real world

¹²⁰ For a discussion of the relevance of this verse for defining Dante's world view, and for the reference to Gades see chapter two.

¹²¹ See Ovid, *Met.* II 832-75.

and mixes his creations with a strong understanding of real world geography and cartography to bolster the truth claims which are essential to the success of his poetic project.¹²²

While the importance of Ulysses' voyage within the poem is well established on a metaphorical level, I am not aware of any other work which has explored the importance of the canto's language of sailing and voyaging within a medieval cultural and geographical context.¹²³ Although it is the character of the ancient Greek Ulysses who narrates the journey, it is the thirteenth century Florentine poet who furnishes us with the specific details and takes into account contemporary experiences with winds, waves and sails in the Mediterranean sea. The importance of voyaging imagery in this infernal encounter is underscored by the fact that Ulysses' speech begins with the commencement of his ill-fated journey: "Quando / mi diparti da Circe, che sottrasse/ me più d'un anno là presso a Gaeta" (When I sailed away from Circe, who'd beguiled me to stay more than a year there, near Gaeta [*Inf.* 26. 90-92]).¹²⁴ Unlike other sinners who take the opportunity to defend themselves or describe their sins when given the chance to speak, Ulysses instead narrates the voyage he took with his men across the Mediterranean and into the southern hemisphere. The narrative takes the listener along a programmatic journey from the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy all the way to the Western limits of the Mediterranean. My illustration of this voyage follows:

¹²² For a deeper discussion of the relationship between truth and fiction within the *Commedia* see Barolini (1992).

¹²³ Maria Corti's 1989 article is focused solely on the metaphorical significance of sailing and not its practical application to the episode. Carol Chiodo's 2014 dissertation gives an interesting reading of the flight of Geryon contextualizing it alongside medieval navigational technology. While she addresses the material and economic conditions of navigation at the time of the *Commedia* she does not conduct an extended reading of the Ulysses episode.

¹²⁴ Gaeta is an ancient city on the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy, just northwest of Naples. Classical mythology had located Circe's home on the mythical island of Aeaea, which by Virgil's time had been identified with the *Capo Circe* on the northern coast of the gulf of Gaeta.

L'un lito e l'altro vidi infin la Spagna
Fin nel Morrocco, e l'isola d'i Sardi
E l'altre che quel mare intorno bagna

One shore and the other I saw as far as Spain
far as Morocco, and the island of the Sardinians
and the others that sea surrounds

Inf. 26.103-105 (translation mine)

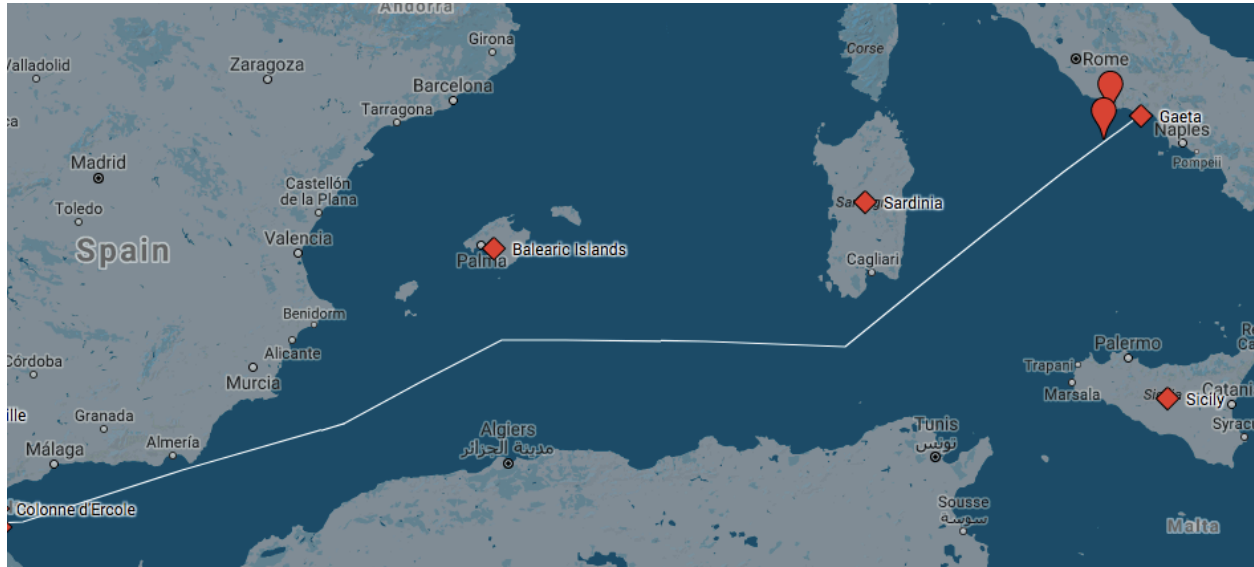


Fig. 7 Map of Ulysses' journey indicating places named. Created with Google My Maps.

When looking at these verses alongside a map it may seem self-evident that the poet is describing the major landmasses which are on the route from the western coast of Italy to the Atlantic. However, it is important to note that there are a number of well-known locations which are geographically situated along the route that the poet chooses not to name. He does not reference Palermo, Tunisia or Bejaia; all locations which would have been familiar and which he names at other junctures in the poem.¹²⁵

The poet's careful geographical selections show that his description is not necessarily based on the consultation of a map or even a list of ports, but rather reflects an awareness of the standard trunk routes which had taken hold in the medieval Mediterranean due to the conditions of travel and trade. John Pryor explains that these trunk routes were designed to make use of

¹²⁵ Palermo: *Par.* 8.75 Bejaia: *Par.* 9.92 Tunisia: Utica: *Pur.* 1.74 & Carthage: *Par.* 6.49. Chiavacci Leonardi also highlights that he fails to mention Sicily and the Balearics "a differenza di altri suoi precisi paesaggi geografici." (note to *Inf.* 26. 105).

islands and coastlines when winds and currents did not favor ships going in certain directions. He describes how an average voyage traveling from Sicily would choose its path: “head north-west to the south coast of Sardinia and thence...west across the open sea to the Balearics. From there all of the North African coast and the Gibraltar approaches were easily accessible” (7). He highlights the choice to specifically avoid the North African coast, due to its reputation as a treacherous coastline full of shallows, reefs, rocky cliffs and offshore islands from the easternmost tip of Tunisia all the way to Ceuta in the west (21).¹²⁶ Once a vessel has reached the westernmost edge of the Mediterranean, Spain and Morocco are practically touching which makes avoidance of the north African coast impossible and is illustrated in the joint reference to Spain and Morocco as well as the later mention of Ceuta (*Inf.* 26.111).

Ulysses relates that by the time they reached the columns of Hercules, mythically located in the straits of Gibraltar, he and his companions were already old and slow (*Inf.* 26.106), suggesting that much time had passed. This seemingly dramatic flourish also reflects the historical conditions of navigation in the medieval Mediterranean. Pryor emphasizes that another reason for the trunk routes along the various islands was due to the fact that prevailing winds and currents from the Northwest to the Northeast made travel particularly slow and difficult toward the West and meant that invariably journeys in that direction took twice as long as journeys to the East (6). A number of contemporary accounts of voyages corroborate this fact, although Dante’s description of Ulysses’ journey does not relate the numerous stops which would have been necessary to await favorable winds, refresh supplies or avoid storms and pirates.

Pryor discusses the technological innovations which somewhat improved Mediterranean

¹²⁶ Corti (2014) argues that these are the routes used by Arab geographers and traders in an effort to make explicit connections between Dante’s text and the Arab world. However, according to historians of navigation it appears that these routes were favored by travelers from both shores of the Mediterranean.

travel at the beginning of the fourteenth century, but he ultimately concludes that any improvements in the construction and design of sailing vessels would not have been significant enough to make controlling the ship's direction, particularly against the wind, much easier than it had been in previous centuries. Pryor describes the technical problems which faced navigators of the age: "because of their keel and hull configuration in particular, and rigging and design in general, sailing ships of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had great difficulty tacking into any sort of head wind" (6). Since Ulysses and his men were traveling against the wind, it makes sense that the journey from Gaeta to Gibraltar would have found them old and slow by the end.

One of these medieval technological innovations was the use of triangular lateen sails which could be moved and adjusted in order to attempt to use the direction of the wind to the ship's advantage rather than being completely at its mercy. These were considered a significant improvement on the immobile square sails which had been in use since Roman times. However, Pryor explains that the lateen sails as they were used in the Middle Ages were not nearly as versatile as modern versions and the design of the ships made it difficult to take advantage of their mobility and triangular shape: "in terms of performance to windward, the advantages derived from their lateen sails were very much mitigated by their hull design" (34). Not only was it still incredibly difficult for sailors to have much control over the vessel against the wind and currents, but any attempts they did make at tacking the sails were risky and challenging, especially considering the size of the average merchant ship in the medieval Mediterranean (42). Any contemporary reader familiar with the painstaking and uncertain process of sailing west across the Mediterranean with a large crew would have read Dante's description of Ulysses' journey with appreciation for its difficulty and no surprise at its duration.

Now that Ulysses' crew has slowly and painstakingly made their way across the

Mediterranean, Ulysses pauses his narrative when they reach the straits of Gibraltar. He relates: “da la man destra mi lasciai Sibilia,/ da l’altra già m’avea lasciata Setta” (upon my right, I had gone past Seville, and on the left, already passed Ceuta [*Inf.* 26.110-11]). Although the narrative does not relate that the crew stopped in either of these cities, the use of the verb *lasciare* calls to mind the many vessels which were laid up at the Atlantic port cities for months waiting for favorable conditions to continue their journeys. Murray points out that these observations are not those which would be made by a sailor actually undertaking this journey, as Seville is not visible from the sea, but must necessarily be made by an author consulting a navigational chart which exaggerates the location of Seville relative to the sea.¹²⁷ We can see the importance of these two cities, and their relation of equivalence in figure 9 where both cities are featured prominently with their flags and appear directly across the straits from each other.¹²⁸

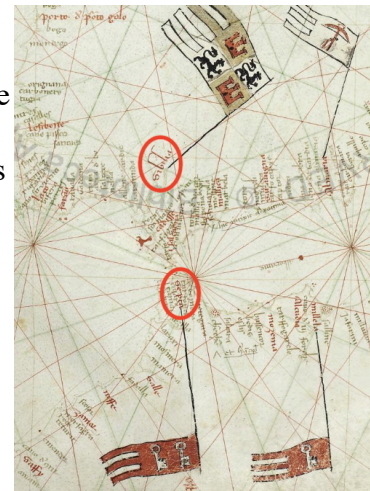


Fig 8. Close up of Sibilia and Septa in Pietro Vesconte, *Portolan Chart*, c. 1320, British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/portolan-chart-of-western-europe-by-pietro-vesconte>

The narrative of the journey pauses at the Pillars of Hercules, where Ulysses makes his great speech to his men in verses 112-120. He addresses them as brothers “che per cento milia / perigli siete giunti a l’occidente” (who having crossed a hundred thousand dangers, reach the west [*Inf.* 26.112-113]). Although this certainly refers to the many mythical obstacles faced within the literature by Ulysses and his crew after leaving Troy, this also calls to mind the navigational challenges and dangers just discussed

¹²⁷ “...Ulysses’ words cannot record an eyewitness experience. A student of the Carte Pisane, on the other hand, might think otherwise: partly because it much extends the channel between Spain and North Africa eastwards, and partly because the coasts are all there to be read off from the chart” (81).

¹²⁸ The representation on Vesconte’s map does not accurately reflect the geographical relationship between the two cities, but it was common for important port cities to be indicated more prominently and for this prominence to adjust their representation slightly.

above. The need for inspiration as Ulysses and his men gear up to cross the strait reflects the reality of the voyage. Archibald Lewis explains the stakes of entering the Atlantic from the Mediterranean:

...it is difficult for a sailing vessel to reach the Atlantic against a strong current often combined with adverse winds. As late as the mid-nineteenth century there were times when sailing ships had to lay up in Mediterranean ports near the Straits for as long as three months before east winds made it possible for them to travel westward. (140)

Besides the necessity to be able to stop and prepare for the journey along the western shores, he also highlights the importance of oars for making it past adverse winds and currents. Ulysses relates that his men were so inspired by his speech that they made wings out of their oars (“de’ remi facemmo ali al folle volo” [*Inf.* 26.125]). The steering oars themselves, it should be noted, are widely considered by modern scholars to have been highly efficient as steering mechanisms and to have performed almost as well as the later sternpost rudder (Pryor, 34). Ulysses relates that they continued to gain on the left side, meaning that they are eventually making their way Southwest. This is crucial, because although the passage through the straits of Gibraltar was difficult, Italian and Catalan ships had been making their way through and then up north to England and Bruges since at least 1250. The first recorded attempt to head south was the 1291 voyage of the Genoese Vivaldi brothers, from which they never returned.

Although the Vivaldi brothers were not able to contribute any major discoveries to Western geographical understanding, their voyage is considered crucial for Dante’s worldview as it is the beginning of Atlantic exploration and represents the possibility of new discoveries. It has frequently been argued that the inspiration for Dante’s description of Ulysses’ journey, and specifically the invention of his shipwreck, was directly provided by the ill-fated voyage of the

Vivaldi brothers.¹²⁹ In fact, the words which Ulysses uses to spur his men past the straits seem to echo the exploratory spirit which was beginning to take hold in fourteenth century Europe:

d'i nostri sensi ch'è del rimanente	unto your sense, you must not deny
non vogliate negar l'esperienza,	experience of that which lies beyond
di retro al sol, del mondo sanza gente.	the sun, and of the world that is unpeopled.
	<i>Inf.</i> 26.115-117

Dante's southern hemisphere is necessarily unpeopled, because his cosmology relies on an uninhabitable southern hemisphere to host his mountain of purgatory. Although the mountain is Dante's own creation, the majority of Christian scholars argued for the uninhabitability of the southern hemisphere. However, at Dante's time explorers were beginning to push the limits of what was geographically known and the Vivaldi brothers were not a sole example, as they seem to be within existing Dante scholarship.¹³⁰ The Vivaldi's journey may have been famous and their shipwreck notorious, but their exploration was part of a larger ethos of trade and navigation which had an effect on geographical thinking, even before any significant discoveries were made. Therefore, it is conceivable for Dante to imagine that the only land that Ulysses and his men see on their journey in the southern hemisphere is the island of purgatory in the distance. At the same time, there exists a drive for Atlantic and African exploration which is evidenced in Ulysses' speech to his men and would have been familiar to some of Dante's early readers.

Exploration was not outside the realm of possibility at Dante's time, although at this very

¹²⁹ For some examples of this argument, see Corti (1989), Cachey (1995), Hawkins (1999) and the commentaries of Hollander and Chiavacci Leonardi.

¹³⁰ In the early fourteenth century another Genoese explorer, Lancelotto Malocelo successfully discovered the first of the Canary Islands, which was named Lanzarote after him and first appears on the Dalorto chart of 1339. However, sources are unclear as to when he set out on this voyage and how widespread knowledge of it would have been at the time. Some sources argue for a departure as early as 1311. While it is unlikely that Dante had knowledge of this particular voyage before he wrote the Ulysses episode, it is important to note the kind of liminal geographical environment in which Dante's poem is being written.

early stage there were very few successful examples—which would have made Ulysses’ narration that much more dramatic. When Ulysses relates that five months passed before his vessel saw land again, we must be aware of the significance of this remark.¹³¹ In describing the common navigational approach, Tangheroni explains that in general merchant ships did not navigate without sight of land for more than two or three days (196). Puchades expands on this remark, explaining how significantly medieval Mediterranean navigation made use of the land:

When the coastal features disappeared from view, the only thing sailors could do was estimate the distance they had travelled from the last point by following the average direction marked by the compass...Each drastic change of direction forced by the wind had to be marked again on the chart and became the new point of reference; the margin of error, however, increased proportionally to the passage of time, until the sighting of new coastal features made it possible once again to determine the ship’s position with a certain degree of accuracy. (462)

Despite the possibility of using charts and compasses to calculate the ship’s position in open waters, Pryor is quick to point out that while compass technology certainly existed, it was not widely used since the majority of voyages were conducted within sight of the shore (53-54).

Although compasses may not have been widely used, contemporary sources indicate a general awareness of the technology outside of navigational spheres.¹³² Dante references a compass in *Paradiso* 12. 29-30: “Si mosse voce, che l’ago a la stella / parer mi fece in volgermi al suo dove” (there came a voice, and as I turned toward it, I seemed a needle turning to the polestar.).¹³³ While compasses were well-known enough to indicate that they were in general

¹³¹ Cinque volte raccesso e tante casso
lo lume era di sotto da la luna,
poi che ‘ntrati eravam ne l’alto passo

Five times the light beneath the moon had been
rekindled, and, as many times, was spent,
since that hard passage faced our first attempt

Inf. 26.130-132

¹³² Francesco da Barberino’s *Documenti d’amore* (1309-1311) is the oldest extant source to name the common navigational tools of the time: *compasso*, *larlogio* and *calamita*.

¹³³ Chiavacci Leonardi glosses this verse by explaining the depth of the similitude: “Dante si trova, come l’ago, al centro di un cerchio con vari punti di riferimento.”

use, they would not have been relied upon by a vessel floating in the open ocean, but rather as one of many tools to keep track of the ship's location on the chart. Using a chart and a compass together made it easier for a navigator to orient himself in relation to one of the thirty-two wind directions. Turnbull describes this function:

The means of locating a port or coastal feature on a portolan chart was not by reference to a mathematical grid but to distance and direction, the latter originally conceived as wind direction. Later, each wind direction was translated into a compass direction through a subdivision of the horizon circle into thirty-two colour-coded but unnumbered points. (10)

The thirty two directions would have been made up of the eight main winds drawn in black or brown, the next eight half-winds (i.e. N-NE) in green and the sixteen quarter winds (i.e. North by East) in red. This made it possible for navigators to quickly glance at a chart and determine the wind without having to follow the entirety of the circle to determine its name.

Dante references the various names of the winds when he compares them to worldly renown:

Non è il mondan romore altro ch'un fiato	Worldly renown is nothing other than
di vento, ch'or vien quinci e or vien quindi,	a breath of wind that blows now here, now there
e muta nome perché muta lato	and changes name when it has changed its course
	<i>Pur.</i> 11.100-102

These winds appear prominently on early portolan charts, although the specific names were far from established at this early period. Classical sources like Pliny and Isidore list twelve principle winds following the Greek and Latin traditions. Based on portolan charts and navigational sources it appears that the eight wind system was more practical, but classically minded scholars preserved the twelve wind system out of respect for its origins and they are often included on *mappaemundi*, as their lack of utility was not a problem on maps not designed for navigation. Some portolan charts even included the names or initials of the classical winds along the edges

of the map, not as a navigational aid but as a gesture toward the tradition.¹³⁴

The use of the winds and the calculation of distance and direction is crucial to understanding the difference between early portolan charts and the scaled maps that we currently use. A portolan chart has no scale. Rather, the mapmaker chooses an arbitrary point from which to begin drawing his wind directions and then the navigator needs to faithfully keep track of his distance and direction in order for the chart to remain useful to him. However, once Ulysses begins his journey south he is literally in “uncharted” waters. Although his crew could keep track of the general distance and direction they have traveled, as we have seen in the Pujades quote above, the margin of error increased the farther the vessel traveled from the last sight of land. Ulysses and his crew have traveled for five months, so any reader familiar with medieval navigation would presume that they have no idea where they are.

Interestingly, Ulysses mentions that they only saw the stars of the Southern Hemisphere: “tutte le stelle già de l’altro polo / vedea la notte” (At night I now could see the other pole and all its stars [*Inf.* 26.127-8]).¹³⁵ Throughout the *Commedia* Dante evidences a strikingly detailed knowledge of astronomy and the positions of the stars. Generally the star positions are used to

¹³⁴ The eight wind names in common use during Dante’s time mostly stemmed from the Italianate *Lingua Franca* used by sailors during the medieval and early modern periods. The two exceptions are Libeccio (SW) from the Greek *Lips*, said to derive from Libya, and Ostro (S) from the Latin *Auster* which can also be found in Virgil’s *Georgics* alongside the Boreas and Caurus, winds whose names had fallen out of favor by the Middle Ages. The medieval terms for the Southeastern (Scirocco) and Southwestern (sometimes Garbino instead of Libeccio) winds seem to derive from the Arabic for East (*al-sharq*) and West (*al-gharb*).

¹³⁵ Chiavacci Leonardi points out that such references make us realize that “il viaggio di Ulisse sembra svolgersi solo di notte (come osserva il Renucci), visto solo dalle stelle e dalla luna. Egli viaggia in realtà nelle tenebre.” (Ulysses’ journey seems to take place only at night (as Renucci observes), only seen by the stars and the moon. In reality he travels in the dark). However, it is also crucial to remember that the poet never refers to the sun in the entirety of the *Inferno*, due to its association with God who is necessarily absent from hell. This is also a damned voyage, conducted without divine authorization, and therefore it also should not benefit from the light of God. In fact, Ulysses relates that they turn their backs on the sun which represents God: “e volta nostra poppa nel mattino” (and having turned our stern towards morning [*Inf.* 26.124]).

indicate the time between different locations, and these calculations are not always scientifically accurate.¹³⁶ However, despite general knowledge of star positions and relationships, according to Campbell, European navigation did not rely on methods of astronomical navigation until the fifteenth century. The technique was first introduced by the Portuguese in response to challenges faced on voyages outside Mediterranean waters (386). Even when European navigators were able to accurately use celestial navigation to calculate latitude, it was impossible to obtain an accurate longitudinal calculation until three centuries later.¹³⁷ It appears somewhat ironic that in Ulysses' voyage the sighting of land does not signify the chance to re-calculate the ship's position, but rather as the final sight before his fatal shipwreck. He relates how his crew's joy at sighting land was short-lived: "de la nova terra un turbo nacque" (for out of that new land a whirlwind rose [*Inf.* 26.137]). We are left with no doubt that his shipwreck is not accidental, but that the storm was sent to attack the vessel "com' altrui piacque" (as pleased another [*Inf.* 26.141]). Dante may have invented this end for the famous Greek, but it seems clear that the entire episode has been leading up to a tragedy.

Ulysses' "folle volo" (mad flight [*Inf.* 26.125]) and shipwreck have important narrative functions within the poem, which will be revisited by the poet both explicitly in each canticle with a reference to Ulysses, but also implicitly through the recurring use of the word *folle*. Despite this narrative importance, Cachey (2015) has argued that Ulysses' shipwreck "represents a gesture of resistance to the new extra-Mediterranean Atlantic space that was emerging" (239). While Ulysses' voyage has interesting historical connections to early attempts at Atlantic navigation, such a reading ignores the multiple other layers of Ulysses' significance as a figure

¹³⁶ See the discussion on how this leads to an inaccurate length of Mediterranean in Chapter 2.

¹³⁷ See Ash (509, note 3).

throughout the poem. Ulysses' journey is certainly in conversation with the new ethos of Atlantic exploration, but just because it ends in shipwreck does not mean that Dante resists the possibility of exploration beyond the Mediterranean. Rather, we see a journey outlined by an author familiar with the conditions of Mediterranean travel and navigation.

Through this familiarity with medieval navigational techniques we can understand just how dangerous and unprecedented a journey such as Ulysses' would have been. Dante and his contemporaries believed that the Southern Hemisphere contained only water and at the time there was no evidence to the contrary. Contemporary knowledge held that a journey which ventured south of the equator would encounter no land and contemporary navigational techniques were notoriously poor at calculating location without the use of land. Even despite the metaphorical and theological significance of a shipwreck willed by God, such a journey would necessarily have been foolhardy and dangerous. The poet has scripted his voyage in such a way that the contemporary reader would have recognized that the voyage as written was headed for perdition in navigational terms as well. Evidencing awareness of this fact does not mean that Dante is against the idea of exploration, but rather that he had a strong understanding of exactly what this exploration entailed and what the costs of it could be.

The Sociocultural Stakes of Geographical Knowledge

In order to truly understand Dante's relationship to the geography of his day, it is necessary to have a fully historicized understanding of what geographical knowledge was, how it was represented and the ways his society interacted with it. The previous analysis dealt primarily with the specifics of navigation and way-finding in the medieval Mediterranean. By analyzing Dante's choices in mapping Ulysses' voyage alongside historical documentation on the routes and challenges of medieval navigation, we can see that Dante is in direct conversation with this

sphere of his society. Choices which may seem merely poetic to a modern reader are shown to have important cultural significance through a historicized reading of the journey and its references.

Such an approach is also necessary to understand other aspects of Dante's geographical knowledge, particularly as it relates to his awareness of the latest charts and maps of his age. This section will engage with previous studies on Dante's geography and its relationship to navigational charts, highlighting the moments in the text which evidence a particular awareness of contemporary charts. Going beyond identification, this section will then consider the social and cultural significance of choosing these representations and situate them within a larger cartographical framework. This consideration will take into account not just the sphere of cartography and navigation, but also the political uses of this developing technology and what relation Dante's work might have had with these developments.

In the Heaven of Venus, Folchetto di Marsiglia introduces himself by reference to his birthplace, as have many characters preceding him in the *Commedia*. What is striking about his geographical periphrasis is its cartographical sophistication: "Ad un occaso quasi e ad un orto/ Buggea siede e la terra ond'io fui" (Beneath the same sunset, the same sunrise lie both Bougie and my own city [*Par.* 9.91-92]). By indicating that both cities across the Mediterranean share the same sunrise and sunset, and therefore lie on a common line of longitude, Dante is stating a fact that goes beyond general geographical knowledge. The geographer Paolo Revelli first called attention to the significance of this reference in his 1922 study of the geography of the *Commedia*, ultimately declaring that Dante's geographical understanding was of the highest caliber. Revelli draws our attention specifically to the 1325 chart attributed to Angelino Dalorto which clearly shows this relationship between the two cities (fig. 10).



Fig 9. Close up of relationship between Marsiglia and Buggea in Angelino Dalorto, *Portolan Chart*, c. 1325, Prince Corsini Collection, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-233480924/view>

Although Dante himself would not have seen this particular chart, scholars of cartography are certain that the references in Dalorto's chart are following a long standing tradition, the precursors of which have not come down to us. This same relationship between Marsiglia and Buggea is not visible on the Hereford world map (c.1300), which seems to indicate "Russicada" as being across from "Marsiglia." A modern day satellite image would also indicate that Dante and Dalorto were correct and that the two cities do lie directly across the sea from each other.

The poet evidences the specificity of his cartographical knowledge again in *Inferno* 14 in his description of the exact positioning of the *Veglio di Creta* on the Island of Crete: "che tien volte le spalle inver' Dammiata / e Roma guarda come sūo specchio" (who stands erect—his back turned toward Damietta—and looks at Rome as if it were his mirror [*Inf.* 14.104-105]).

Chiavacci Leonardi glosses this verse by explaining that Dammiata, a city on the coast of Egypt, represents the Orient and the Veglio faces toward Rome because this direction represents the teleological path of civilization. However, Dante was very careful not just to describe the *veglio* facing Rome with its back to the generic east, but grounds his metaphor in highly accurate geographical specificity. As we can see in an image from the Dalorto chart of 1325, there is a clear straight line from Dammiata passing through Crete and ending at Rome.

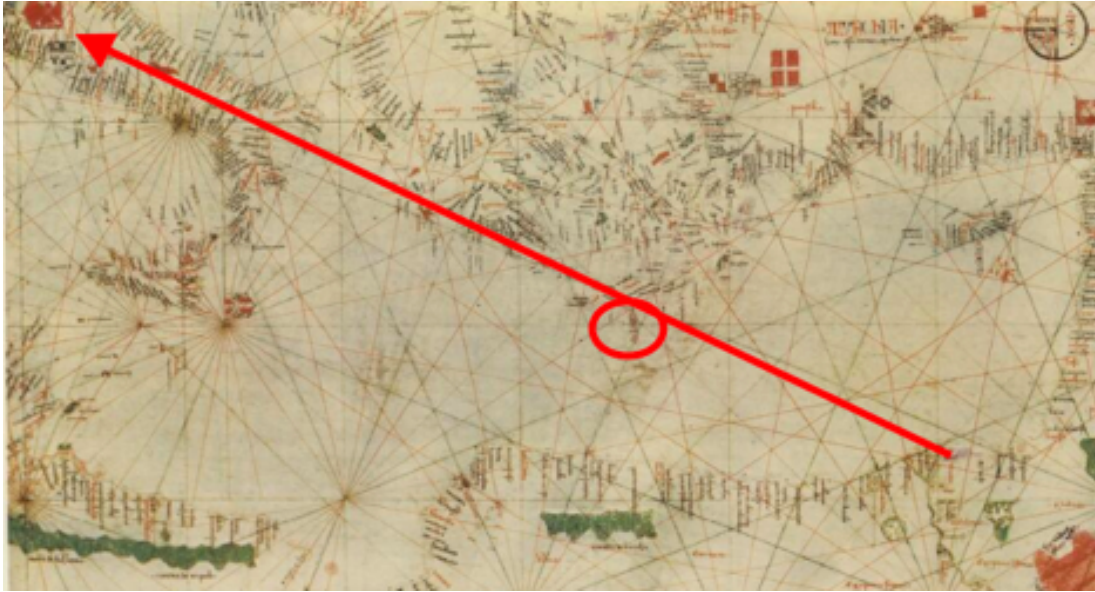


Fig 10. Image of line connecting Dammiata to Rome in Angelino Dalorto

While Dammiata was a well known city for trading reasons, there were many Egyptian cities which would have been known to Italians for their mercantile and historical significance. A number of other cities could have easily filled in for a generic reference to the “East.” As this chart makes clear, Dante’s geographical descriptions are never purely metaphorical but always rooted in an appreciation of the latest technology and an awareness of its specificity.

This reading of Dante’s references alongside cartographical sources, as well as the analysis of Ulysses’ voyage using navigational history, shows how a study of Dante’s geography can be enriched through a historical and geocritical approach. However, it is not enough to shed light on Dante’s references without putting them into a larger conversation with the study of the history of cartography. We should not approach the geography within Dante’s poem as something which is only influenced by *real* cartographical sources like maps and charts, but rather see Dante’s contributions as a part of a larger conversation within a culture undergoing rapid cartographical development. To only try to determine what Dante’s sources were and how well-

informed he was for his time belittles the contributions that his text makes to his society's understanding of geographical knowledge.

Ramon Puchades i Bataller is one historian of cartography who argues for the importance of using literary references to gain a deeper understanding of the role of navigational technology in medieval society. He states: "when a medieval poet constructed an image it was because that image had to form part of the world with which his potential readers were familiar, otherwise he would have failed to attain the emotional impact he pursued" (444). As we saw in the analysis of Ulysses' voyage, navigators at Dante's time would never have traveled without sight of land for more than five months. By making this reference Dante is counting on his readers being aware of this fact and that this awareness will help them grasp the madness of the *folle volo* attempted by Ulysses and his men. Similarly, when Dante specifically highlights the relationship between Marsiglia and Bugea or the line from Dammiata through Crete to Rome, he is relying on at least some of his readers to recognize the cartographical accuracy of his references.

When Revelli argued that Dante had an awareness of portolan charts by showing how his references prove it, he was also effectively arguing that the milieu in which Dante was active would have been aware of these developing forms of navigation. It is not just important to the field of Dante studies to show that Dante was not ignorant of the latest geographical developments. As Puchades' statement suggests, the fact that Dante clearly includes references to portolan charts in his poem written in the early fourteenth century should be a much more significant fact to scholars of cartography than it currently is. Debates surrounding the nature of portolan chart production and development, as well as questions as to dates and locations are all left unsettled within the field. Although the *Carte Pisane* are dated to the late thirteenth century,

scholars debate whether that was a lone early example or just one of the few remaining charts from a rich production. Similarly, while the Italian influence on the tradition is clear through the *Carte Pisane* and the work of Genoese Pietro Vesconte in Venice, historians also question how strong the field of cartography was in Italy as compared to the Spanish and Portuguese productions. The fact that an Italian poet, who is not directly writing a work of geography or cartography, incorporates such sophisticated references to navigation and charts within his work serves as a strong argument for how widespread the knowledge of this new form of cartography would have been in early fourteenth-century Italy outside of the spheres of society explicitly involved with trade and navigation.

Up until this point, this chapter has provided historical background information to enrich our understanding of the explicit geographical references and descriptions made by the poet. However, in order to take our analysis of Dante's geography to a higher level, we must also take into account the ways in which geographical knowledge is at play in the text even when the subject matter may not appear explicitly geographical. J.B. Harley has contributed to our understanding that maps are highly contingent forms of representation and he argues that "our task is to search for the social forces that have structured cartography and to locate the presence of power—and its effects—in all map knowledge" (2). I would argue that Harley's approach to analyzing "map knowledge" be expanded to enrich the way we engage with geographically inclined literary texts. This understanding of the way cartography functions in society is crucial to evaluating both the significance of Dante's understanding of geography as well as his mobilization of geographical knowledge in his text. Such a reading goes beyond the identification of place names or confirmation of geographical accuracy and instead analyzes how Dante's geography is engaging with socio-political currents which are not evident without a

deeper understanding of the historical milieu.

Trade, Crusade, and Material Culture

We have seen how rapidly the field of navigational charts was developing at Dante's time and the increased level of accuracy achieved by this genre in comparison to the older format of the *mappaemundi*. In chapter two we discussed the centrality of Jerusalem and noted that the planisphere of Pietro Vesconte is often cited as an example of a fourteenth century map which includes a prominently centered Jerusalem. However, as shown in chapter two, the choice to center Jerusalem was almost always political rather than spiritual, and Vesconte's planisphere is no different. More important to understanding this source and its relevance as an intertext for Dante's geography is a deeper look at the historical conditions surrounding its development and dissemination. This planisphere, a number of charts of the Mediterranean region, and city plans of Acre and Jerusalem, were created by Vesconte to accompany the political treatise of Marino Sanudo entitled *Liber secretorum fidelium crucis* (The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross). Sanudo compiled manuscripts of this work and sent them to major religious and political figures to convince them to support a third crusade to the holy land to reclaim Acre, which the Europeans had lost to Muslim control in 1291.

There are a number of features of the maps included in this collection which betray their political motivations. The charts Vesconte created of the Mediterranean for Sanudo's collection stretch much farther to the East than his previous charts, presumably to emphasize the growth of Islam and to convince wealthy Christian patrons to support Sanudo's cause.¹³⁸ Flags identify the ruling powers of each major port city along the coasts. These are some of the earliest charts to

¹³⁸ Puchades argues that many portolan charts tended to focus on the Western Mediterranean region because it was much more interesting economically for the Tuscan and Ligurian coasts (473). Since this chart is created for political rather than economic reasons, the focus is on the region of the proposed crusade.

include flags, although they became a standard by the fifteenth century. Sheehan argues that the flags might have been included at the request of Sanudo to illustrate to his readers the significance of Muslim control in the region. Similarly, Sheehan also hypothesizes that the inclusion of city maps, specifically in Palestine, would “prompt the recipient of the *Liber* to reflect upon the fall of these great cities to the infidel” (121). Throughout his work, the main charge Sanudo makes against Islam is that it, like Greek orthodoxy, “enticed people away from the ‘true faith’ of Roman Catholic Christianity” (Edson 2004, 150). His religious argument for the need of Christian control across the globe was to limit the possibility for other religions to have the power to attract the faithful. However, economically, his native Venice would have had much easier access to the Eastern Mediterranean if they controlled key cities in the holy land.

As we saw in chapter two, mapping of the holy land was generally not rooted in a specific scriptural interpretation, but rather reflected the contemporary political situation. When Christian fears about Islamic control of Jerusalem were on the rise, maps prioritized highlighting the holy city as the center of the world. When Christians comfortably controlled larger portions of the Middle East, mapmakers were less concerned with emphasizing the centrality of Jerusalem. Similarly, Sanudo’s argument, while it incorporates religious claims to the superiority of Christianity and the degradation of Islam, is primarily focused on economic and mercantile arguments. The first step of Sanudo’s plan to weaken the Muslim forces and eventually reclaim Acre, was an embargo against Egypt. Edson points out that Sanudo was not the first to suggest this approach, but that “in the past enforcement had depended on the penalty of excommunication. Christians could always buy their way out of this, while Muslims were not impressed” (133). Sanudo suggested introducing a fleet of Christian vessels to patrol the waters, but also conceded that Europe would not suffer greatly from the loss of trade since he suggests

that “disobedient Christians, pretending to deal in permitted goods, would treacherously bring in forbidden items” (Edson, 135).

The complexity of Sanudo’s plan, as well its social and political implications, are fascinating intertexts with comments made by the Italian Ghibelline, Guido da Montefeltro, in *Inferno* 27. Encountered by the pilgrim directly after his interview with Ulysses, Guido is punished amongst the fraudulent counselors for his part in helping Boniface VIII defeat the Colonna family. In explaining the entanglements which led to his damnation, Guido describes what was most heinous about the pope’s political machinations that he supported:

e non con Saracin né con Giudei, ché ciascun suo nimico era cristiano, e nessun era stato a vincer Acri né mercatante in terra di Soldano	and not against the Jews or Saracens for every enemy of his was Christian, and none of them had gone to conquer Acre or been a trader in the Sultan’s lands...
--	---

Inf. 27.87-90

Guido is upset that the pope is fighting against Christians. By setting up this dichotomy the poet suggests that had the same plan been carried out against Jews or Saracens it would not have been so reprehensible. If the pope is fighting Christians, he implies, it should at least be because they helped the Muslims win back Acre in 1291 or because they were trading in Muslim lands at a time when it was forbidden.¹³⁹

“Mercatante in terra di Soldano” is a loaded phrase which provides significant insight into a much broader social and political situation that had been developing in Italy from the end of the eleventh century. We see from Sanudo’s detailed consideration of the issue, that trade with Muslims was so lucrative that threat of excommunication was not enough to convince Christian merchants to give up the enterprise. The goods were also so important to European society that

¹³⁹ For example, the Fourth Lateran council (1215) prohibited transporting wood, iron and pitch to Saracen lands (see Sanudo, 56).

Sanudo implies that Eastern goods would still make their way clandestinely to European shores, but that the embargo would ensure that the Sultan would not be able to claim taxes on the goods.

Sanudo's very long *Liber* covers everything from the history of the foundation of Islam to the time of Saladin, but Book I begins with very practical economic and martial plans for "The Disposition and Preparation for the Recovery of the Holy Land." He shows a very detailed knowledge of the most valued goods and alternative routes for obtaining them in Europe and has a carefully thought out plan for the Venetians to attack the harbor city of Alexandria which is geographically very similar to their home city and where they are well prepared to fight.

Despite the theological arguments contained within Sanudo's treatise, his initial priorities are clearly economic and his strategies are based on strong cartographical and navigational understanding. This connection between cartography, trade and crusade is not limited to Sanudo's 1321 project but is rather a complex interrelationship which accounts for a number of the major milestones in each of the three fields. Puchades argues that Christian martial efforts in Islamic territories were always intricately tied to the mercantile interests of the specific powers sending troops and supplies: "The great seaborne republics of the Full Middle Ages (from 10th-13th centuries) took part to a greater or lesser extent in...crusades depending on their vested interests, and they reaped much benefit from the privileges granted between this time and the fall of Acre in 1291" (414). He reports that many specific campaigns to "regain" Christian control of Muslim-held regions can be seen to make trade routes more secure or provide safe ports for traders to stop at on their journeys and are very rarely only influenced by religious convictions. By the time Dante (and Sanudo) are writing, Italian trade in the Mediterranean and beyond was already well-established. Documents from the Geniza manuscripts indicate Venice, Lucca, Salerno, Gaeta and Pisa were all trading with Egypt by the late eleventh century. Archival

evidence shows significant commercial traffic between Genoa and Pisa and North Africa and Muslim Spain during the same period. There was also a considerable presence of Italian trading vessels in England and Flanders by the end of the thirteenth century.¹⁴⁰

The conflation of trade and crusade is not absent from Dante's text, although his exploration of it is somewhat circumspect. In the Heaven of Mars the pilgrim meets his crusading ancestor, Cacciaguida, who describes his death at the hands of "quella gente turpa" (that execrable race [*Par.* 15.145]) during the first crusade (1095-1099). This encounter is often read as Dante's desire to establish his noble lineage from a warrior ancestor, although no documentary evidence exists to determine how much of this lineage is invented by the poet.¹⁴¹ Dante enters the Heaven of Mars at the end of *Paradiso* 14 with a host of Crusading imagery: a cross which flashes "Christ" as the souls sing "Resurgi" and "Vinci" ('Rise' and 'Conquer' [*Par.* 14.125]). However, the focus of his time in this heaven is not on the nobility of crusade but rather the ignobility of Dante's contemporary Florentine society.

Before discussing the significance of Dante's conversation with his ancestor, it is important to note how interesting his choice of topic is for the Heaven of Mars. He could have used this opportunity to glorify Christian crusades over the centuries and call for a renewal of these efforts. As we have seen, his near contemporary Marino Sanudo is actively calling for a new crusade in the 1320s and even Petrarca in the following generation will express similar

¹⁴⁰ See Puchades (414-415).

¹⁴¹ See Inglese (26-28).

sentiments in his poems.¹⁴² Although Dante is certainly proud of his ancestor, and sees crusade as a noble war unlike the disruptive, factional warfare plaguing his contemporary society, he does not dwell as much on the topic of religious war as we might expect. As we see throughout the poem, it is the social and political problems of his native Florence which predominantly occupied the mind of the poet. Most interesting to our geographical reading is that the problems of Florence can never be completely separated from a larger understanding of the socio-economic developments within the Mediterranean.

Intermingled with his introduction and life story, Cacciaguida takes time to lament the social situation in contemporary Florence compared to his more tranquil society of the eleventh century. He compares his contemporaries who were wearing simple belts of leather and bone (*Par.* 15.113) to the fourteenth-century Florentine women wearing elaborate crowns and gowns with belts that are more to look at than themselves (*Par.* 15.102). Worse than this, women at Dante's time are not content to be "al fuso e al penneccchio" (at spindle and at spool [*Par.* 15.117]). However, this might be explained by the fact that no Florentine woman at Cacciaguida's time was "per Francia nel letto diserta" (for France's sake...deserted in her bed [*Par.* 15.120]).

This transition from holy war to Italian fashions and customs is not as much of a leap as it might appear on the surface and not a connection which existed only in the mind of the poet. Puchades has shown that European martial efforts in the holy land can always be tied up with the economic and trading interests of the European powers involved. However, Florence was not a

¹⁴² For example see *Rerum Vulgaria Fragmenta* 28.52-57:

Questa se, più devota che non sòle,
col tedesco furor la spada cigne,
turchi, arabi et caldei,...
quanto sian da prezzar, conoscer dêi

So that if they became more devout than they are,
and took up swords with German fury,
of the Turks, Arabs and Chaldeans...
we would soon find out the worth

significant early medieval trading power, nor was the city-state involved in many of the conflicts which other Italian powers engaged in to obtain more secure trade routes or footholds in foreign markets. Scholar of Italian fashion Rosita Levi-Pisetzky has shown that the simplicity exhibited by Florentines of the eleventh century is less based on their modesty and more due to the fact that they did not yet have access to the exquisite luxury goods which Genoa and Venice had just started to import around the turn of the thirteenth century. Cacciaguida's generation was presumably the last to have limited access to the luxury goods which Dante will later consider a great societal degradation. Levi-Pisetzky notes that in the twelfth century port cities such as Genoa, Palermo and Venice first showed signs of expensive and exotic fashions being worn by classes outside of the elites. Silk arrived from the Levant, indigo dye from Morocco and the clothing of royalty even in the north of Italy showed Byzantine and Saracen influences. Jewels and gold were imported from the Orient for the garments of the wealthy and often the resulting garments were traded farther inland and West for even greater profit.¹⁴³ When Dante longingly describes his Florentine ancestors "andar cinto/ di cuoio e d'osso" (girt with leather and with bone [*Par.* 15.112-113]), it might be less an indication of their moral virtue and instead due to the fact that the more elaborate accessories were imported from the East and had not yet arrived to inland Florence.

Through Cacciaguida's lament for the wives abandoned "for France's sake" (*Par.* 15.120), Dante is specifically addressing the mercantile reasons for much of the contemporary social upheaval.¹⁴⁴ Not only are merchant activities leading to shockingly ostentatious fashion

¹⁴³ See Levi Pisetzky (173-193).

¹⁴⁴ Buti clarifies Cacciaguida's remark: "nulla delle donne fiorentine era abbandonata dal marito per andare a stare in Francia a mercatantare, *come si va oggi*" (non of the Florentine women were abandoned by their husbands to go to stay in France for trade, *as they do today* [emphasis mine]).

trends, it is also leading to the breakdown of family and social structures. Cacciaguida continues to compare the happy fate of earlier Florentine wives to those of Dante's day, for "ciascuna era certa / de la sua sepultura" (each one was sure of her burial place [*Par.* 15.118-119]), which means Italians were not dying in distant lands in pursuit of wealth. The problems implied in Dante's critique of the trading culture which was becoming stronger in his day are not based on the actual mercantile activities, but rather the significant geographical distances involved. First of all, the goods which are enriching the Florentine nouveau riche at an alarming rate are not Italian products being traded in Italy, but rather spices and luxury goods from much farther East. At the same time, the fact that the most valuable goods are far away means that merchants are traveling farther and farther in order to trade in more expensive materials and gain higher profits. This leads to abandoned wives and unknown graves, but also incredible danger and uncertainty. As Ferrante points out "In [Dante's] time, only merchants in search of new markets or new sources of supply ventured as far into the unknown as Ulysses did" (320). As we have seen in this chapter's reading of Ulysses' journey, Dante was well aware of the risks and challenges associated with such a long and uncertain voyage into uncharted waters. He seems not to believe that the economic benefits outweigh the danger.

This is not the only episode in the poem which looks with derision upon those who travel too far for selfish motives. Only once outside of the Ulysses episode does Dante specifically refer to travel in the high seas and in both instances there is a negative connotation which is worth exploring. In *Paradiso* 11 the pilgrim has just been told the story of St. Francis by the Dominican St. Thomas Aquinas. *Paradiso* 12 will feature the Franciscan St. Bonaventure telling the pilgrim the story of St. Dominic. In keeping with the humility of the souls in paradise as well

as the balanced rhetoric of the *canti*, Aquinas ends his laudatory discussion of St. Francis with a discussion of the current degradation of the Dominican order.¹⁴⁵ Aquinas prompts the pilgrim to think on St. Dominic with a nautical metaphor:

Pensa oramai qual fu colui che degno	Consider now that man who was a colleague
collega fu a mantener la barca	worthy of Francis; with him, in high seas,
di Pietro in alto mar per dritto segno.	he kept the bark of Peter on true course.

Par. 11.118-120

In this metaphor Dominic is represented as a skilled navigator who is able to keep the vessel of Peter on true course, even in the high seas, which as we have seen was a particularly challenging task given the navigational techniques and technology of the age. What makes this reference even more significant is how the verse continues. In describing the degeneration of the Dominican order, the saint laments the greediness of later generations who have strayed from the founding principles of the order, using highly mercantile language. First he compares the teachings of Dominic to good merchandise (“buona merce” *Par.* 11.123), then he describes their straying in a way which makes the Dominicans sound rather similar to the merchants who Cacciaguida blames for the breakdown of Florentine society:

Ma 'l suo pecuglio di nova vivanda	But now his flock is grown so greedy for
è fatto ghiotto, sì ch'esser non puote	new nourishment that it must wander far,
che per diversi salti non si spanda.	in search of strange and distant grazing lands;

Par. 11.124-126

Although this primarily serves as a metaphorical indictment of the Dominican order at Dante's time, Dante's choice of metaphor and association between greed and travel to distant lands cannot be separated from the other references to the recently expanded mercantile economy of Florence and its role in destabilizing traditional Florentine society. The choice of this imagery is

¹⁴⁵ For an analysis of the balanced rhetoric within these *canti* see Barolini (1992), 199.

a reminder that navigational technology is truly inseparable from the social activity which incited and spurred its development: trade, which in the century preceding Dante had grown at an enormous rate and drastically changed the Italian economy.

Trading the *Commedia*: Production and Circulation in the Mercantile Spheres

Although Dante holds a negative opinion of specific aspects of Florentine society which had a connection to growing commercialism and the importation of fine goods, this is not to say that he is completely against trade and mercantile culture. Joan Ferrante argues that Dante's "attitude toward commerce is essentially a moderate one, accepting it as a fact of life, a potential benefit to society, as long as it serves the common good and does not harm the community in order to advance individuals" (316). Dante's conversation with Cacciaguida focuses on the negative changes to Florentine society brought about by the relatively recent economic upheaval. However, it is worth bearing in mind that the poet and the poem are also a product of this society in transition. He may bemoan his society's recent prioritization of wealth over nobility, but the changing balance of social power was not only a negative to a poet of unremarkable birth. In many ways the conditions which fostered the success of his Italian vernacular poem are intricately linked to the social upheaval which came about as a result of the expanding merchant culture in the medieval Mediterranean.

A number of the arguments which Puchades puts forth for the development of the conditions which led to navigational improvements, also created the environment in which Dante's poetry flourished. Puchades argues that the greatest impetus for the use of the vernacular was the increased literacy necessary as the Western Mediterranean regions engaged in higher volume trade in farther parts of the world. In order to keep track of the numerous transactions

happening at multiple ports and with various companies, writing could not be a skill only used by those who had the time, money and resources to spend years of their childhood learning Latin. As trading companies became larger they needed more notaries able to quickly write up transactions and contracts and confirm the legality of agreements. This expanded the spheres of society which were using written language and the language was necessarily the one that they already spoke and in which they were conducting these business transactions.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, although Dante is frequently spoken of as the father of vernacular literature, the *Commedia* comes about within a society which has already been exploring vernacular literary production. As Alison Cornish has pointed out: “embarking on a poem of the magnitude and gravity of the *Divine Comedy* presupposed the production of literature in vernacular translation already in full swing” (11).

The economic necessity to read and write in vernacular languages led to a larger audience for vernacular poetry, prose and other written works. Puchades emphasizes that this economic necessity was responsible for breaking the shackles of the church which had previously controlled the diffusion of knowledge in Latin. Maps of the world could no longer only be focused on the information contained in the bible and only recorded in the language of the church. New maps needed to reflect the navigational expertise acquired by sailors who were constantly gaining new knowledge on their frequent journeys, and this knowledge needed to be recorded in the vernacular language spoken by these tradesmen. He concludes: “Indeed, the writing of space was nothing more than one of the last landmarks in that process of the spread of writing as a fundamental technique of organising society” (416).

¹⁴⁶ See also Cornish (2011) for a similar discussion of the dissemination of the vernacular through mercantile spheres.

We also know that merchants were among the first audience of the *Commedia* and Ferrante concurs that “we can assume that [Dante] was speaking, at least in part, to them” (315). Not far from the realm of merchants was that of notaries, and one of the earliest references to the *Commedia* appears in the 1314 *Documenti d’amore* of Tuscan notary Francesco da Barberino. This is particularly notable for our purposes as this same manuscript also serves as the earliest extant record of specific tools of navigational technology. Again in 1317 it is a notary, ser Tieri degli Useppi da San Gimignano, who leaves a few verses of *Inferno* (3.94-96) on the cover of the Bolognese Register of Criminal Accusations.¹⁴⁷ In 1321 we find more verses of *Inferno* (19.97-99) inserted by ser Giovanni d’Antonio into the margins of a contract. The close relationship between notaries and poets in the Italian literary sphere is well established. However, for the purposes of understanding Dante’s relationship to cartography, it has never been highlighted how close the relationship was between the increase in Italian trade and the development of the notarial profession. Bridging the gap, Ahern also reports that a Florentine grain merchant in his ledgers from 1320 to 1334 includes a quotation of Ugolino’s speech in *Inferno* 32. He goes on to give other evidence that the poem was popular among “low-end” and illiterate audiences and that this popularity inspired both performances of the poem as well as vernacular commentaries and summaries for unlearned audiences.

Ahern also highlights the fact that not just the audience and language of the *Commedia* was connected to the merchant and working society, but that also the means of its production took inspiration from those fields. Speaking of Dante, Ahern explains: “he appears to have circulated consecutive installments whose format invited rapid, economical reproduction....The

¹⁴⁷ See Ahern (2003) for a full discussion of the first copies and citations of the *Commedia*.

format that he chose built on textual practices familiar to urban professionals...who constituted the heart of his audience” (12). Ahern credits this format with the quick circulation of the text and its diffusion across social classes. However, he also explains that these early simple paper booklets of the poem have all disappeared from the historical record. Although Dante is writing a poem which would become a classic of Western literature, at the time he is writing his words are reproduced with the same speed as the early navigational charts, lists of ports, merchants’ wares and notarial record books. In considering Dante’s participation within an early developing mercantile culture we must place him amongst his contemporaries and not as the father of Italian literature that he has become. This mode of production and early readership grounds the *Commedia*’s significance within the same society which was producing and engaging with early navigational charts. Through a historicized understanding of the means of production and dissemination of Dante’s vernacular poem, as well as contemporary cartographical materials, we can see that the worlds of the *Commedia* and those of the early navigational charts are not so distant as might be presumed.

In this chapter we have explored how Dante’s writings engage with the navigational culture which was expanding and developing as he wrote his *Commedia*. We saw specific examples of charts which reflect the view of the world illustrated in certain passages of the poem. By using historical information on navigational technology of the time we were also able to see the high degree of accuracy used by the poet in describing Ulysses’ journey and how that navigational awareness is evident in other parts of the poem. By situating Dante as a user of geographical knowledge we can also recuperate his position as an interlocutor in a rapidly changing navigational culture. We have seen how this culture is intricately linked with the

mercantile societies which simultaneously spurred the development of navigational technologies and benefited from their improvement. Understanding this, we must also situate Dante as a member of this society, both influenced by its advancements as well as influencing how his culture engages with geographical knowledge. This chapter also goes beyond explicitly geographical references and episodes in order to provide a deeper understanding of how cartography and trade are intricately linked and how this link is often related to crusading efforts abroad. In the following chapter we will explore further the ways in which European representations of the world outside of Europe are almost always linked to economic interests and questions of sovereignty. Through Dante's depiction of the prophet of Islam, referred to in the *Commedia* as Maometto, we will see how questions of European identity and anxieties are intricately tied up with medieval European representations of the Islamic world and its relationship to Christianity.

Chapter 4.

Mapping Maometto: The Geographical Stakes of *Inferno* 28

... *e vidi uscirne un drago*

Purgatorio 32. 131

In the case of a work as canonical as the *Commedia* it is not only important to understand the context and sources of the references made by the poet, but also how those references have been received over centuries of readership. We have seen that scholars have differed on their approach to Dante's representation of physical geography or his knowledge of the cartographical technology of his age. In the past chapters we began to consider the question of Dante's knowledge of and relationship to the world outside of Europe. In chapter two we looked at how he constructs the center and the margins of his world and the significance of his choices for defining his worldview. Chapter three showed that his knowledge of specific cartographical sources proves his awareness of precise locations of important non-European port cities, as well as the navigational realities of traveling great distances. We have established that Dante was highly knowledgeable of the navigational techniques and geographical information of his age. However, geographical knowledge goes beyond the names of points on a map and the distances between them. One may know that a place exists and generally where it is located, but is important to consider what other social, cultural and political knowledge gets ascribed to that place and what it means to have that knowledge.

The third chapter continued by connecting the topics of trade and crusade, showing that Dante's interventions on Florentine fashions and customs have geographical implications beyond the Italian city-state. This discussion explored the fourteenth century preoccupation with the

threat of Islam as a military and economic power which had the potential to block European mercantile interests in the region. However, in the Middle Ages Islam also represented a *theological* threat to the dominance of Christianity and its potential influence on the souls of humanity. This theological threat must also be conceived of geographically, considering that the expansion of Islam westward often led to the conversion of Christians who lived in those territories or at the very least loss of power for Christian authorities in the region. Since the earliest commentaries, critics have read the representation of Maometto and Ali in *Inferno* 28 not merely as another encounter with two sinners, but as a tool for approaching an understanding of Dante's thoughts on the religion of Islam. Just as we have seen in previous chapters on geographical knowledge and navigational technology, the questions often surrounding the material are: "What did Dante know about this topic?" and "What could any medieval Italian have known?" *Inferno* 28 is often explored by critics in order to understand not only what Dante could have known about the historical prophet Muhammad and his son-in-law Ali, but more broadly, what this canto can tell us about his opinion on Islam, based on the sources available at his time. I argue that through a close reading of this canto we can come to understand, not just Dante's view of Islam as a religion, but also Dante's ideas about the Islamic world from the perspective of geographical knowledge.

This chapter will trace how scholars from the earliest commentaries to the most recent analyses have approached the representation of Maometto and Ali and specifically the geographical stakes of the claims and assumptions made by the scholarly tradition. By comparing the explanations offered by the first commentators and more recent modern scholars, we can uncover a particular modern bias which presupposes a certain amount of medieval

ignorance in the face of Islamic culture and theology. Scholarly analysis can very rarely be depoliticized, but in this case there appears to be a particularly strong modern assumption about what a medieval Italian poet could have known about Islam and the Islamic world and how he must have mobilized this knowledge. For our purposes this modern preoccupation is particularly interesting because it employs a number of anachronistic modern assumptions about how medieval thinkers were able to conceptualize their world. The general trend in modern scholarship insists on a higher degree of ignorance than an analysis of the medieval sources provides. As we will see throughout this chapter, the assumptions underlying this trend have geographical implications for how we understand medieval views of the world in a way which projects modern concerns about the clash of civilizations and unresolvable differences between the East and the West. In order to weaken the influence of modern preoccupations on a reading of Dante's Maometto we need to incorporate a thoughtful analysis of the earliest sources, as well as a reading of the tradition which traces the changes between Dante's first and current readers.

Maometto is a representation of the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, and Ali is his cousin, son-in-law and the fourth caliph of Islam. However, it is not enough to know this basic historical information, as the reception of this episode and our response to it is particularly fraught because the choices of the poet and how they are analyzed by critics have significant contemporary implications. Arabic translators of the *Inferno* have chosen to completely omit this section in deference to the fact that it is so offensive to followers of Islam.¹⁴⁸ A chapel in Bologna which contains images of this passage has been the target of multiple terror threats over the past two

¹⁴⁸ See Einboden (2008), 79-82. Gabrieli (1970) also claims in his *Enciclopedia Dantesca* entry on Maometto that the depiction of the prophet in *Canto 28* led to the *Commedia* being banned in Pakistan, but I have not been able to find any evidence to support this claim.

decades.¹⁴⁹ The representation of Maometto in *Inferno* was also used as evidence by an Italian NGO calling for the text of the *Commedia* to be banned from school curricula because it is “racist, homophobic, anti-Islamist and anti-semitic.”¹⁵⁰ In response to such supposedly “liberal” concerns, right-wing politicians like Matteo Salvini turn to Dante, and particularly his depiction of the founder of Islam, as a proud part of Italian heritage. In a 2016 speech at Piazza San Croce in Florence, Salvini derides the suggestion to no longer read the *Commedia* in schools due to its depiction of the Prophet of Islam. In his speech he cites part of the description of Maometto and Ali (which Dante “dared” to write), as evidence that Islamophobia is a fundamental part of Italian society: “L’aveva capito qualche secolo fa...per l’estremismo islamico a Firenze, in Italia, non c’è posto” (He understood it some centuries ago...There is no place for Islamic extremism in Florence or Italy).¹⁵¹

While both Muslim and Christian extremists politicize the negativity of the depiction of Maometto to mobilize their supporters, there is also a long tradition of scholarship asserting that Dante had more than an average interest in the Islamic world and Arabic sources of knowledge. The most notorious contribution to this field is Miguel Asín Palacios' 1919 *Escatologia*

Musulmana en la Divina Comedia. Palacios went so far as to suggest that the poet's inspiration

¹⁴⁹ See Giansoldati (2015) and Einboden, 77.

¹⁵⁰ See Squires (2012). This statement was also opposed by a number of organizations and there is no evidence that it was ever enforced.

¹⁵¹ Speech posted on Youtube by Agenzia VISTA: “E soprattutto Firenze diede i natali a un signore che ci ha lasciato una delle opere d’arti [sic] più importanti del mondo, una delle opere d’arti [sic] che qualche fenomeno di sinistra, che qualche pseudo insegnante, che qualche pseudo educatore vorrebbe togliere dai banchi delle nostre scuole perché nel canto 28 dell’*Inferno* un signore, un gradino sotto rispetto a Renzi per carità di Dio, che si chiamava Alighieri di cognome e Dante di nome osò qualche annetto fa scrivere “vedi come storpiato è Maometto...dinanzi a me sen va piangendo Alì, fesso nel volto dal mento al ciuffetto.” L’aveva capito qualche secolo fa. L’Italia è un paese che spalanca le porte a tutte le persone per bene però per l’estremismo islamico a Firenze in Italia non c’è posto. Tornate a casa vostra! State a casa vostra a usare il vostro Dio per imporre una legge che non è compatibile con i nostri valori e le nostre libertà.”

for the entire structure of the *Commedia* came from Islamic sources, positing a much stronger influence of the Islamic tradition on European literature than many were willing to accept.¹⁵² Unlike many Muslim translators and readers who consider this depiction a great offense, Palacios actually argued that Dante's depiction of Maometto was relatively lenient for the time, indicating what Palacios saw as a respect for the founder of Islam.¹⁵³ Although the claims of Palacios have mostly been disregarded for lack of textual evidence, his suggestions set off a longstanding conversation in the field of Dante studies which continues until this day.¹⁵⁴ Scholars continue to debate the extent to which Dante was aware of the Islamic world and what his opinion of it might have been. The analysis of the depiction of Maometto and Ali is just one part of this conversation and the interpretations which scholars give to this specific incident can always be seen to connect their analyses to one side or the other of the debate.

Certainly, this and many episodes in the *Commedia* require significant contextualization to be comprehensible to a modern readership. However, this episode is often used for its shock value and overarching cultural significance rather than to promote a nuanced conversation on the relationship between Christianity and Islam in the Middle Ages. In order to approach this topic with due respect for its contemporary and cultural significance beyond the parameters of Dante

¹⁵² In 1924 he published a pamphlet ("Historia y crítica de una polémica"/ "History and Criticism of a Polemic" summarizing the intense controversy surrounding his book just in the four years after its publication.

¹⁵³ Palacios argues: "The leniency of this punishment is significant of Dante's sympathies for Arabic culture. In his eyes, Majomet is not so much a repudiator of the Trinity and Incarnation as a conqueror whose violence cut asunder the ties uniting mankind. Incomplete as his picture may be, it does not display the absurdity marked in the mediaeval fables of the Prophet" (259). All translations of Palacios are from the 1926 English translation by Harold Sunderland.

¹⁵⁴ The ongoing interest in this conversation is best illustrated by a special edition of Dante Studies in 2007 focused on "Dante and Islam." This was later published as a volume in 2015 edited by Jan Ziolkowski. Ziolkowski's "Introduction" provides a helpful guide to the scholarly tradition surrounding the topic.

studies, throughout this chapter I will only use the name Maometto to discuss the character of *Inferno* 28 and his counterpart in medieval polemical Christian sources, in order to distinguish this figure from the historical Prophet Muhammad.

Maometto and Ali are the first of seven sinners encountered in the ninth pouch of the *Malebolge*, a collection of ten pits in the eighth circle of Hell where various sins of fraud are punished. We are introduced to the sinner through three *terzine* of a gruesome depiction of his physical punishment before he calls out to the pilgrim “Or vedi com’ io mi dilacco! / vedi come storpiato è Mäometto!” (See how I split myself! See how maimed Maometto is! [*Inf.* 28.30-31]). His words refer to the specifics of his punishment to be “rotto dal mento infin dove si trulla” (ripped right from his chin to where we fart [*Inf.* 28.24]). From this gaping hole the narrator describes how his bowels and their excrement hang between his legs. He then introduces Ali who walks in front of Maometto “fesso nel volto dal mento al ciuffetto” (whose face is opened wide from chin to forelock [*Inf.* 28.33]). It cannot be denied that the punishment described in this canto is gruesome, although that could be said for many of the more physical punishments inflicted throughout the *Inferno*. Beyond knowing *what* Dante does to Maometto and Ali it is even more crucial that we historicize this moment in the poem in order to contextualize *why* he made these specific choices.

This chapter will begin by identifying a particularly modern interpretive focus on Dante’s punishment of Maometto and Ali among the schismatics. A trend in recent Dante scholarship has led to an overwhelming consensus in the literature which insists that Dante’s choices in depicting Maometto stem from his belief in Western European origins for both the founder of Islam and by extension the religion as well. While this reading has some basis in medieval biographies of the

prophet, there are also many medieval sources which contradict this assumption. Despite the diversity and nuance which exists in many medieval sources, the resounding emphasis within recent scholarship is that Dante *must* have believed in a *Maometto* who was originally a European priest. Although we will see that some scholars over the past centuries have rejected this assumption, the continued recourse to this myth of Christian European origins for Islam shows that these casual interventions have not been strong enough to set the record straight. Medieval Christian polemical literature on Islam was diverse and complex. Challenging the geographical assumptions and western biases of most recent scholarship on the topic requires an extensive historicized and geocritical approach to the material, Dante's poem and the ensuing scholarly tradition.

By tracing the origins and development of this preoccupation we will come to understand the interpretive stakes associated with how modern scholars represent medieval views of Islam. In order to contextualize this modern approach, we will rely on a thorough investigation of medieval sources to develop a more nuanced understanding of medieval Christian views of Islam. We will then return to the *Commedia* by considering the earliest commentaries on the canto and contrasting their opinions with those ascribed to them by modern commentators. Furthermore, by reading Dante's *Maometto* in light of his representation of Islam in *Purgatorio* 32, we will gain a clearer image of how Dante approaches the religion and how his contemporaries understand his choices. This will serve to prove that the commonly accepted opinion of twentieth and twenty-first century scholars is not based on a recuperation of the earliest sources, but rather stems from one particular modern reading of these sources and is reproduced through selective citation and ignorance of the medieval context.

Interpretation of Dante's opinion on Maometto is particularly challenging because, unlike many of the sinners in *Inferno* who give long speeches on their backgrounds and crimes, Maometto tells the pilgrim nothing about himself but his name and the physical specifics of his punishment. Ali does not even speak, but Maometto tells us his name and the manner of his punishment. For scholars trying to ascertain how much Dante could have known about Islam, the poet does not give us much material. The canto does not even identify Maometto as the prophet of Islam, and it seems that the poet was relying on his readers' familiarity with the infamous figure. After this short introduction of names and punishments, Maometto has the task of introducing the sin of this *bolgia* to the pilgrim and his guide:

E tutti li altri che tu vedi qui,
Seminator di scandalo e di scisma
 Fuor vivi, e però son fessi così

And all the others that you see here
 were *sowers of scandal and schism*
 when alive, and for this they now are split.
Inf. 28.34-36 (translation mine)

“The others” that the pilgrim will meet form a motley crew of sinners from varying time periods and geographical locations: the Italian Pier da Medicina (mid thirteenth century AD), the Roman Gaius Scribonius Curio (90-49 BC), the Florentine Mosca dei Lamberti (died 1243 AD) and the French Bertran de Born (1140-1215 AD). Fra Dolcino of Novara (1250-1307) is implicitly included amongst these sinners because Maometto addresses him as a fellow schismatic (*Inferno* 28: 55-60), but he is still alive in 1300 during the narrative date of the poem and therefore cannot appear as a character. The fact that Maometto uses his limited time with the pilgrim to address Dolcino specifically is also very important for our understanding of Dante's conception of religious schism. The historical significance of the figure of Dolcino and how he relates to the figures of Maometto and Ali has been explored further in an “excursus” at the end of this chapter.

The range of “scandal and schism” represented in the canto is relatively broad. Pier da Medicina created discord between the Malatesta and Polenta families in Romagna. Curio is punished for urging Julius Caesar to cross the Rubicon and attack Rome. Mosca dei Lamberti is accused of initiating the political conflict between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines which Dante laments throughout the poem. Bertran de Born instigated a rift between King Henry II and his son. Although the *bolgia* is for “sowers of scandal and schism” all of these other sinners are guilty of sowing scandal, that is political or civic discord, rather than religious schism.¹⁵⁵ Maometto and Ali are the only resident sinners guilty of the religious variety of discord, if we do not include the implicit condemnation of Fra Dolcino, and this has created something of a conundrum for modern scholars trying to make sense of Dante’s choices and specifically his theological conception of “schism.”

Modern Approaches to Understanding Maometto

The consultation of almost any modern commentary on this canto introduces the reader to an interesting problem arising from the definition of Maometto as a “schismatic” and the modern understanding of that term. The Catholic Encyclopedia (1912) defines schism as:

the rupture of ecclesiastical union and unity, i.e. either the act by which one of the faithful severs as far as in him lies the ties which bind him to the social organization of the Church and make him a member of the mystical body of Christ, or the state of dissociation or separation which is the result of that act.

This modern understanding of schism has led scholars to question how Maometto and Ali could be punished amongst the schismatics for severing the ties which bind them to the church, when

¹⁵⁵ Chiavacci Leonardi cites Guido da Pisa’s 1327 commentary to explain: “Le divisioni qui punite, come dichiara la *terzina* citata, sono di due specie: gli *scandali*, o discordie civili, e gli *scismi*, o divisioni nel corpo della Chiesa.” (The divisions here punished, as the cited *terzina* explains, are of two types: scandals, or civic discord, and schisms, or divisions in the body of the Church).

we know that the historical Prophet Muhammad had no ties to the church to begin with.

Nicola Fosca relates in his 2003 commentary that the choice to depict Maometto as a schismatic is based on the medieval legend that Muhammad was "un cristiano traviato dai malvagi consigli d'un apostata, o addirittura un cardinale deluso nella sua aspirazione al papato" (a Christian lead astray by the evil counsel of an apostate, or even a cardinal deluded in his aspirations to the papacy). Robert Hollander (2000) explains the imagery of this canto based on "Dante's conviction that the prophet was in fact a Christian whose schismatic behavior took the form of founding (in 630) what Dante considered a rival sect rather than a new religion, Islam." Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (1991) cites "la tradizione medievale dell'Occidente" ("the medieval tradition of the West") as well as the works of Vincent of Beauvais and Brunetto Latini,¹⁵⁶ which maintain that Muhammad was "in origine un prete cristiano, spinto allo scisma da un alto prelato (per alcuni lui stesso) deluso nelle sue aspirazioni" (originally a Christian priest, pushed into schism by a high prelate (for some he himself) deluded in his aspirations).

While these serve as a few representative examples, it is safe to say that the modern position adopted by most commentaries and scholars writing on the topic is that Dante had very little information about the historical Prophet Muhammad and the details surrounding the establishment of Islam in Arabia at the beginning of the seventh century AD. In fact, the most prevalent modern contention is that Dante and his contemporaries did not even attribute the

¹⁵⁶ It is important to note that Brunetto Latini is considered Dante's source on many subjects and not just for information on Islam. However, it is also important to remember that in chapter one we saw evidence that his use of geography was often shown to be inaccurate and that these inaccuracies cannot be taken to mean that Dante was not aware of the geographical knowledge of his time. Although Dante was certainly aware of his teacher's writings this in no way suggests that he is required to completely ascribe to their inaccuracies, particularly those which were amended by Dante's society in the decades between Latini's death and the *Commedia*.

foundation of Islam to an Arab, but rather to a Western Christian priest. This priest, from Spain or Italy depending on the source, was preaching Christianity to the pagans in Arabia when he learned that he had been denied the papacy upon the death of the previous pope. Incensed by this rejection, the priest changed his message to the Arabs, declaring himself a new prophet and inventing a new religion.¹⁵⁷ The source of this story is generally attributed to “the early commentaries” or “medieval legends” and has been almost unanimously accepted by Dante scholars in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.¹⁵⁸

However, the reproduction of this legend as the explanation for Dante’s choices in *Inferno* 28 is not simply one possible way of reading the canto. The propagation of this myth has theological and cultural significance and radically alters how we understand Dante’s relationship to Islam. If Dante truly believed this story about the foundation of Islam this means that he, and presumably many of his contemporaries, were woefully ignorant of even the most basic historical facts about the religion. What is also crucial to note about this modern insistence on the identity of Dante’s Maometto is the geographical emphasis of the argument. Medieval Christians were confused about many aspects of Islam and the prophet’s life, but this modern reading of Dante’s Maometto seems to insist that a medieval Italian poet would not have been able to conceptualize the importance of Islam if the religion and its founder did not have Western

¹⁵⁷ Medieval sources for this story found in D’Ancona (1889) and Yolles and Weiss (2018). D’Ancona traces the various versions of this story in medieval sources. Yolles and Weiss include an English translation of the thirteenth century Italian *Liber Nicholay*, one of the sources cited by D’Ancona.

¹⁵⁸ Contained in the commentaries of Fosca (2003), Hollander (2000), Chiavacci Leonardi (1991), Mandelbaum (1980), Bosco & Reggio (1979), Giacalone (1968), Chimenz (1962), Porena (1946), Provenzal (1938), Grabher (1934), Scartazzini & Vandelli (1929), Pietrobono (1924), Steiner (1921), Casini & Barbi (1921), and Torraca (1905). All commentaries except Mandelbaum consulted at *Dartmouth Dante Lab*. Also in numerous articles and encyclopedia entries such as Ziolkowski (2015), Ventura (2010), Coggeshall (2007), Akbari (2000) & Gabrieli (1970).

European origins. This assertion is not insignificant, because if we are to believe that Dante was only aware of the story of the apostate cardinal, then he apparently had not read any of the available Western polemical sources based on actual Islamic material or the translation of the Qur'an which had been produced during the middle of the twelfth century.¹⁵⁹

There is also an important geographical assumption underlying our acceptance of this story and it affects our modern interpretation of the medieval European view of the world. If we accept that Dante and his contemporaries believed that a Western Christian created the religion of Islam, then we are allowing that medieval Europeans saw Islam as a fundamentally European invention. This assertion leads to two possible understandings of the relationship between medieval Christian Europe and Islam. One implication is that medieval Europeans saw the world beyond their borders as an unimportant periphery and were only willing to consider any part of it significant when it intersected with their reality. The opposite assertion would suggest that claiming European origins for the founder of Islam actually brings the two cultures closer together, by recognizing a common heritage rather than seeing Muslims as radically different “others.”

The first position can be found in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, in which he argues: “In Dante’s poem...the Orient and Islam are always represented as outsiders having a special role to play *inside* Europe” (71). Said identifies Dante’s Maometto as a tool to further this Orientalist approach to Muslims, arguing that Dante’s project is “at one and the same time to characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage...*for* Europe” (71). It is unsurprising that Said is able to extend his understanding of Orientalism, which he applies to

¹⁵⁹ We will discuss the sources on Islam available to Medieval Europeans below, but for an overview see Burman (2007) & (2015) and Gazquez (2015).

all of European culture, to fit a reading of Dante's *Commedia*. However, while Said is attempting to use this reading of the meeting with Maometto to show how Western hegemony has denied any agency to the "Orient" on its own terms, similar readings of Maometto's role in the *Commedia* have also been used by Dante scholars who wish to prove, in spite of the theories first espoused by Palacios, that Dante's ultimate interest is in Christian Europe and not the Islamic world.

Giuseppe Gabrieli took such an approach in his 1921 *Dante e l'Oriente*, a work which purported to address the question of the *Commedia*'s potential literary connections with what Gabrieli deems "le letterature orientali" (oriental literatures).¹⁶⁰ While Gabrieli claims to provide a purely historical and factual account of the sources available to Dante at his time, it becomes clear that he is writing in direct response to the theories espoused by Palacios, theories which he intends to negate. In describing the encounter with Maometto, Gabrieli highlights the dearth of personal and historical information contained in the exchange. Gabrieli takes this silence as proof of Dante's lack of interest in the "vera e reale figura di Maometto" (the true and real figure of Maometto, 105). Just as Said saw Maometto as playing a role in a performance for a European audience, so too does Gabrieli deny any potential interest in the historical Prophet Muhammad and suggests that Dante employs a mere caricature to make a point. Throughout his work Gabrieli looks for these kinds of "proof" which are meant to demonstrate Dante's lack of interest

¹⁶⁰ Gabrieli defines the aims of his project as: "la questione cioè dei probabili o possibili rapporti letterari, o nessi genetici, fra la *Divina Commedia* e le letterature orientali, affermati e sostenuti da alcuni, negati ed esclusi da altri." (the question of the probable or possible literary relations, or genetic networks, between the Divine Comedy and oriental literatures, affirmed and sustained by some, negated and excluded by others [vii]).

in or knowledge of Islam as a direct refutation of Palacios' claims that the poet of Italy may have received any inspiration from Arabic sources.

However, the contention that Dante was unaware of the specifics of early Islamic history and Muhammad's life can also be used to make the opposite claim. For one thing, it is much easier to forgive the medieval poet for his offensive depiction of the prophet if we can ascribe his choices to ignorance rather than hostility. Some have also attempted to use Dante's potential belief in the medieval legend of the rogue priest to recuperate the figure of Dante the Islamophile. In an effort to deconstruct the view taken by Said in *Orientalism*, Elizabeth Coggeshall highlights the modern argument that Dante believed Maometto to have originally been a Christian, using this interpretation to argue that "Dante's Islam is not so timelessly foreign as is proposed; instead it is familiar and historical, closer to his Christian sphere in both geography and theology than such an Orientalized view would allow" (134). It is crucial to recognize that just as Gabrieli and many of his contemporaries were fixated on how to dissociate Dante from the suggestions of Arabic influence made by Palacios, a modern movement of scholars is precisely focused on recuperating the possibility of an open-minded Dante who saw beyond the boundaries of nation-states and participated in a larger Mediterranean literary culture of exchange and influence.¹⁶¹

One particular strain of this modern positivist view takes as its task to determine not just if Dante was aware of Islamic sources, but which ones he may have had recourse to in designing the punishment which is inflicted on Maometto and Ali. The most popular hypothesis is that

¹⁶¹ See Menocal (1990) specifically Chapter 5: "Italy, Dante and the Anxieties of Influence," Mallette (2010) especially Chapter 2: "Metempsychosis: Dante, Petrarch and the Arab Middle Ages," Akbari & Mallette (2013), Chapters 1, 2, and 16, and Horden & Kinoshita (2014) particularly Chapter 20: "Mediterranean Literature".

Dante was aware of the story referred to in the Qur'anic Surah 94 “Al-Sharh” (The Expansion) which describes how the young Prophet Muhammad had his chest opened by angels so that they could remove any traces of evil.¹⁶² Roberta Morosini locates Dante’s source for his opinion on Maometto in his awareness of the medieval legend which purported that the prophet trained a bull to come to him with a book in its horns, tricking the Arabs into believing in his divine inspiration. The main problem with this approach is the near impossibility of conclusively proving that Dante knew or was inspired by any of these specific sources. The overwhelming majority of modern scholars who do not specifically focus on Dante’s relationship to Islam are convinced that the poet knew relatively little about the Islamic world and that this ignorance led to his confused portrayal of the Prophet as a schismatic. While it can never be proven what exactly Dante read or knew about Islam, by creating a richer understanding of the historical context and the multitude of sources which existed, we can demonstrate that ignorance was far from the norm and that greater credence should be given to Dante’s ability to construct a nuanced and intelligent response to the threat he perceived from the schismatic Maometto.

Before we can ascribe either of these interpretations to Dante’s Maometto, we need to first address the veracity of the assumption which has been taken for granted by most modern scholars and commentators; the fact that Dante had very little knowledge of the historical details of Islam and based Maometto’s punishment on the belief that he had been a Christian priest before founding a new religion. They have arrived at this assumption due to the fact that modern

¹⁶² The earliest suggestion I have found to this correlation was made in 1903 by Italo Pizzi, more recently brought back to the scholarly conversation by Mallette’s 2007 contribution to the “Dante and Islam” edition of *Dante Studies*. Tommasino (2019) has traced the contributors to this debate including the 2013 contribution of Celli which established more significant sources for Dante’s potential awareness of the legend.

definitions of schism would preclude the punishment of a non-Christian for creating a divide within the body of the church. This leads them to the conclusion that Dante must have thought Maometto was Christian and they find the "proof" of this in "medieval legends" and "early commentaries" often vaguely referred to and rarely cited.

In 1904 John S. Carroll is the first commentator to attempt to explain Dante's identification of the prophet of Islam as a schismatic, by stating that Dante does not see him as the founder of a new religion, but considers Islam to be a schism in Christianity. He does not offer any particular support for this view, but hypothesizes that this may be due to the fact that "Christianity being, in Dante's view, the universal religion, any rival faith which disputed its claims was regarded by him as a schism in the ideal Christian unity of mankind." Interestingly, Carroll goes on to offer a long explanation of the historical appropriateness of Ali's cut from chin to forelock, which reflected his actual assassination by a blow to the head. Although Carroll posits Dante's awareness of this historical specificity, he does not recognize the theological improbability that Dante can only consider Maometto to be a schismatic if Islam is not a new religion but his follower Ali, who certainly was never a Christian, is punished alongside him. Also, Carroll fails to see that his explanation that Dante considered Islam a threat to the universality of Christianity does not mandate that Islam itself was not a new religion. The appearance of an alternative monotheistic religion with many of the same doctrines would exist as a threat to Christianity regardless of its provenance.

Despite the fact that Carroll does not address many of these inconsistencies or propose a more thorough explanation of this new reading, he is part of a larger movement which continues to pursue this mode of interpreting the canto. In 1905 Francesco Torraca is the first commentator

to propose an explanation to the supposed conundrum resulting from Maometto's placement amongst the schismatics. Torraca explains:

Secondo le leggende del M. Evo Maometto fu discepolo d'un cristiano, ed anche, dapprima, cristiano egli stesso, chierico, cardinale, aspirante al papato. Dante si attenne all'opinione comune, e perciò lo pose nella nona bolgia, come scismatico.

(According to the legends of the Middle Ages Maometto was a follower of a Christian and also, before that, a Christian himself, a cleric, cardinal, aspirant to the papacy. Dante holds to the common opinion, and for that reason puts him in the ninth bolgia, as a schismatic.)

Torraca situates his explanation by citing "the legends of the Middle Ages" and emphasizing that Dante held to the "common opinion" by following these legends. He justifies the necessity of his reading of Dante's Maometto by using these legends of the Middle Ages in order to explain how an Arab prophet could be punished as a schismatic.

The majority of twentieth century commentaries follow in his path and assert variations on the same theme. When tracing the actual sources cited by a number of scholars who espouse this view of Dante's Maometto, we can identify one urtext from which this entire train of thought seems to have emerged: an 1889 paper by Alessandro D'Ancona entitled "La leggenda di Maometto in Occidente." This citation appears in the commentaries of Porena (1946), Sapegno (1955), and Singleton (1970) as well as Francesco Gabrieli's *Enciclopedia Dantesca* entry on Maometto (1970) and Suzanne Conklin Akbari's entry on Islam and "Islamic Culture" in *The Dante Encyclopedia* (2000). Rather than a reliance on medieval legends, it appears that most scholars of the past century have relied specifically on D'Ancona's version of these sources, leading to an echo chamber of overconfident assertions on Dante's views of Islam.

D'Ancona begins his paper with two citations from the *Tresor* in which is explained the story of the prophet and the foundation of the religion. The first passage from Brunetto Latini's text is quite short and relates the story of "Machumitto," establishing that he was originally named Pelagio "della casa della Colonna di Roma" (of the house of the Colonna of Rome) and that he spread his religion in the East until he was worshipped as a saint by both Christians and pagans (199). D'Ancona then includes a second version of the story from "il secondo versificatore del *Tesoro*" (the second poet of the *Tresor*) dated to around 1310. This version is much longer and includes the full explanation of a Roman cardinal "de la badia di San Damagio" (from the Abbey of St. Damagio) who desired the papacy and was denied it by the cardinals specifically because he so desired it. In response he went to the East to preach a new religion where he was worshipped as a saint and they began to call him "Malchonmetto." The story goes on to gruesomely relate his death being eaten by pigs, which recurs throughout the polemical Christian tradition and is meant to explain the Islamic prohibition of eating pork. The story concludes by describing his tomb in "Baldacha" which appears to be miraculously floating, but is actually an elaborate configuration of magnets and stones highlighting that the falsehood and trickery of the prophet continues even in death (200-201).

D'Ancona explains his inclusion of this story for two reasons, to show: "l'antiorie cristianità di Maometto e il modo della sua morte" (the previous Christianity of Maometto and the manner of his death, 202). While D'Ancona does not explicitly state that his intention is to shed light on Dante's depiction of Maometto, he is certainly not approaching the topic without the *Commedia* on his mind. In fact, he cites Benvenuto da Imola's commentary on Canto 28 in which the commentator offers a possible etymology for the name Machometus: "quasi malus

comitus.”¹⁶³ Many aspects of the legend described in this excerpt were a larger part of the Christian polemical tradition on Islam and this tradition will be discussed later in this chapter. D’Ancona’s paper goes on to address further variations on these legends and the sources in which they appear, different names for the figures in the stories and diverse polemical explanations for the doctrines of Islam and their similarity to Christianity. There is no reason to call into doubt any of his sources or the existence of these narratives in medieval Europe. However, it is doubtful that this general selection of legends, many of which originated from the eighth and ninth centuries, and the reading offered by one nineteenth century scholar, are the only sources which can help us better understand the cultural specifics which inform Dante’s depiction of this historical figure at the turn of the fourteenth century.

From the two versions of the Machometus as cardinal story which D’Ancona included at the beginning of his paper he concludes:

Le genti cristiane del medio evo non considerarono, nè potevano considerare l’islamismo altrimenti come una eresia, uno scisma; non videro nè potevano vedervi una religione nuova. (202)

(The Christian people of the Middle Ages did not consider, nor could they consider, Islam as anything other than a heresy, a schism; they did not see nor could they see it as a new religion.)

It is true that medieval Christians generally saw the similarities between Islam and Christianity as proof that Islam was a sham religion, copying earlier traditions. The Prophet Muhammad was seen as a lesser Jesus, because he did not perform miracles or claim divinity, and the Christian polemical tradition invented false miracles to ascribe to him and further lower his status.

However, throughout the centuries of contact between the two religions, medieval thinkers were

¹⁶³ Pg 199, note 2.

able to develop many different ways of understanding this rival religion and it is unnecessarily restrictive to declare that medieval Christians could never have seen Islam in more than one way. He goes on to explain that at the time, Christianity was seen as the one true religion and it seemed to have triumphed over idolatry and paganism. Therefore “ogni novità di credenze diveniva necessariamente scissione dell’unità cristiana” (every new belief became necessarily a division of Christian unity, 203). As we will see, it is quite possible for medieval Christians to see Islam as a barrier to Christian unity even when they are aware of all the historical facts surrounding the foundation of the religion.

Historicizing Maometto

Although D’Ancona begins his paper with two examples which highlight the myth of Maometto the originally Christian priest, he goes on to describe alternative versions which circulated during the Middle Ages which do not rely on his Western Christian origin.¹⁶⁴ The most effective polemical sources on Islam relied on stories taken from the Islamic tradition and manipulated these to cast the prophet and his religion in a negative light. The problem for polemicists with the myth of the apostate cardinal founding Islam was that it is so far from the truth that anyone with the slightest knowledge of the Islamic world would consider it ignorant hearsay. This would limit its effectiveness to discourage Christian conversions to Islam or to attract Muslims away from their faith. D’Ancona describes many of these traditions as well. He relates a story from the life of the prophet in which he encountered a Christian hermit named

¹⁶⁴ He recognizes the more academic tradition, including the *Corpus Cluniancense*: “Mentre in molta parte d’Europe correveno su Maometto queste fiabe...da altri cercavasi di schiuder più pure fonti, tornando direttamente alla tradizione musulmana.” (While these legends spread through many parts of Europe...in other parts they tried to open up purer sources, returning directly to the Muslim tradition, 228).

Bahira. According to the Islamic tradition Bahira recognized the signs of prophethood in the young Muhammad and this event is used by Muslims to underscore the divine origin of Muhammad's mission as well as the role of Islam as a continuation of Christianity. However, Christian polemicists converted this figure of the hermit into a heretic who took the young Muhammad under his wing, taught him the old and new testaments and helped him devise fake miracles to trick the Arabs into following him.

This is the general version of the foundation of Islam included in Peter the Venerable's *Summa totius heresis ac diabolice secte Sarracenorum* (The sum of all the heresies and the diabolical sect of the Saracens) included in the *Corpus Cluniacense* alongside the first Latin translation of the Qur'an by Robert of Ketton. This 1142 version of the story attributes the prophet's education to a Nestorian monk named Sergius as well as the Jews of Arabia.¹⁶⁵ Stories of the heretical monk's role in Maometto's rise to power can be found as early as the *Historia Ecclesiastica sive Historia Tripartita* of Anastasius from 871.¹⁶⁶ The *Apology of al-Kindi* was another very popular source against Islam, also included in the *Corpus Cluniacense*, and it includes a tendentious "biography" of the prophet which served to deconstruct his claims to prophethood and divine inspiration. Sergius again appears in this document, although in this version he converts Muhammad to Nestorian Christianity before he goes on to found Islam. The *Apology* also references a Christian figure named "John Bahira" who helped the prophet weave

¹⁶⁵ D'Ancona admits that much of the anti-Jewish sentiment found in these works has less to do with the belief that Jews were involved with the foundation of Islam, and instead reflects a growing anti-semitism in Western Christianity: "corrisponde non tanto forse a una confusa notizia storica, attinta a fonti arabe, quanto ad un nuovo impeto d'odio e furore di persecuzione, che a que'tempi appunto arse in Occidente contro i Giudei" (230).

¹⁶⁶ See Di Cesare (2012) No. 6 and Yoelles & Weiss (2018) No. 2.

together and distort the old and new testaments.¹⁶⁷ Both of these figures are part of an established Christian tradition which aimed to denigrate Islam by questioning the divine mandate of its founder and showing that its similarities to the other Abrahamic religions were really just deceptions.¹⁶⁸

The *Apology* is also notable because it contains a reference to Ali, suggesting that the Nestorian monk and three wicked Jews who manipulated Muhammad also tried to corrupt Ali after his father-in-law's death. This is not the only document included in the *Corpus Cluniancense* which refers to the historical facts surrounding Ali's role in Islam. After Peter's serious and theological *Summa* the collection includes the *Fabule Sarracenorum*, which Oscar and Mendoza define as including three important sections of the *Corpus*: *Chronica Mendosa*, *Liber de generatione Mahumet* and *Liber de doctrina Mahumet*, all ascribed to Robert of Ketton and used by Peter the Venerable as sources in his writings.¹⁶⁹ The *Chronica mendosa et ridicula Sarracenorum* purports to relate the history of Islam from its creation to the massacre of Kufah (661 CE) and includes a section focused on the story of Ali. While the aim of this *Chronica mendosa* is clearly to deride Muslims and their doctrine, it does so by attacking actual Muslim history rather than making up elaborate stories about Islam and its founder.

The story of the rogue Christian priest is much less common and can be traced to sources with more literary aims, rather than the theological attempts to discredit Islam through the manipulation of accurate sources. Any presence of this legend in commentaries on the *Commedia*

¹⁶⁷ See Di Cesare No. 16.4 and Yoelles & Weiss No. 6.

¹⁶⁸ See Daniel, 105 "The belief that Muhammad had Jewish or Christian teachers, often that he had only a Christian one, was all but universal."

¹⁶⁹ See Di Cesare (2012) 16.2.

can be attributed to the fact that it seems to have been circulating in the mid to late thirteenth century in an Italian context. The *Liber Nicholay* matches quite closely with the story presented in D'Ancona's paper; Nicholas is a Roman papal legate to Hispania who expects to be the successor of Pope Agapita II. However, when the papal curia chooses someone else in his absence, he creates a new religion opposed to Christianity. It is presumed that the *Liber Nicholay* was created by or for Dominicans in Italy and is dated to approximately 1261. Scholars have argued that the work is less concerned with the story of Islam and more focused on satirizing the Roman curia and the extents religious figures will go to in their quests for power.¹⁷⁰ As we have already seen, other, more accurate, sources were circulating at this time and there is no reason to believe that the author of the *Liber Nicholay* was necessarily making an argument about the historical conditions of Islam's foundation, but was just making use of common tropes and figures for a literary reflection on the consequences of power-hungry holy men.

Another Italian source with a similar argument, from around the same time period, is the *Qualiter iniquus Mahometus venit et a quibus et quo modo processit* (Where Wicked Muhammad came from and among whom and how he rose to prominence). The *Qualiter* also references Nicholas, although in this version his influence on the foundation of Islam is more distant. This Nicholas expects to succeed Clement I, but is instead branded as a heretic and eventually imprisoned in a tower in Rome where he dies. His disciple Maurus moves to "Arab lands" and convinces a young camel herder named Muhammad to become his follower. Unlike the *Liber Nicholay* which seemed more interested in Roman papal politics than in denigrating Islam, the *Qualiter* can be placed firmly in the tradition of anti-Islamic polemic and is believed to have

¹⁷⁰ See Muñoz (2010) and Yoelle & Weiss (2018) No. 7, also Introduction xxv-xxvii.

served as a resource for sermons against Islam. It only survives in one manuscript at the Dominican Convent of St. Catherine in Pisa and scholars have dated it between 1264 and 1300.¹⁷¹

Of the two thirteenth century Italian sources, only the first can be used to adequately explain the modern analysis of Maometto the schismatic as an apostate Christian priest, and there is no reason to believe that the more learned readers of the *Liber Nicholay* actually believed the elaborate story it invented. As we have already seen, there were sufficient sources available with much more accurate information on the foundation of Islam and evidence of their use and circulation in thirteenth and early fourteenth century Italy. While the *Qualiter* might have been more effective as a polemical source, the Christian monk dies in Rome and it is merely his teachings which make their way to Arabia to eventually be wielded by a young camel herder. Although this does ascribe a western origin to the religion which would become Islam, this does not account for the punishment of the Arab camel herder as a schismatic, since he encounters the teachings of Nicholas when they have already been deemed a heresy and therefore is not a Christian who could create a schism in the modern sense.

The co-existence and simultaneous circulation of sources as different from each other as the completely fictitious *Liber Nicholay* (1261) and *Qualiter* (mid 13th cent) alongside the relatively sophisticated and accurate accounts contained in the *Corpus Cluniacense* (1142) renders any modern reference to "medieval legends" and "common opinion" meaningless. A second translation of the Qur'an was completed in 1210 by Mark of Toledo, a translation which would serve as a reference to the Florentine monk Riccoldo da Monte Croce (1243-1320) in

¹⁷¹ Yoelle & Weiss (2018) No. 7, Introduction xxviii-xxx.

composing his *Contra sectam Sarracenorum* (Against the sect of the Sarracens). Riccoldo composed this work after extensive travels in Baghdad and based his accusations against Islam on his actual experiences living amongst Muslims and studying Arabic, which attests to the existence in early fourteenth century Tuscany of accurate, albeit polemical, sources on Islam.¹⁷²

The aim of this chapter is not to prove exactly which sources Dante used in constructing his image of Maometto, but rather to show the wide diversity of sources which would have been available at his time and to combat the anachronistic modern representation of medieval Europeans as ignorant of the world beyond their lived experience. To maintain that Dante and his contemporaries were completely unaware of the basic facts about Islam included in these popular documents, which had been circulating for at least a century and a half before Dante started writing, is an ahistorical and inaccurate reading of medieval views on Islam.

Michelina di Cesare has traced the co-existence of various accounts of the life of the Prophet and explains how they build on each other but also the ways in which different approaches signify the aims of their authors more than the extent of that author's knowledge on the subject. She shows how poetic works were more likely to incorporate legendary components of the prophet's biography, focus more on fantastical stories and be less interested in closely approximating the historical facts as they were known. Works written on or in support of the crusades were more likely to describe Muslims as violent, lustful idolaters, often to the complete exclusion of any historical facts. Theologians attempting to disprove the validity of Islam were more likely to take a "pseudo-historical" approach and selectively use authentic Islamic materials which they then manipulated to fit their arguments. She explains:

¹⁷² See Burman (2015).

denying and discrediting Muhammad's prophetic status was consonant with denying and discrediting the divine origin of the 'religious law' he promulgated, which itself constituted a threat to the unity of the *orbis christianus*. (1)

Just as we have seen with the advancement of geographical knowledge at the time, while some sources were approximating remarkable degrees of accuracy, others were continuing to reproduce fantastical legends with no basis in reality. Just as we observed about the differences between *mappaemundi* and *portolani*, medieval users of these sources on Islam would not necessarily have bristled at the inherent contradictions between them, as they would have understood the different purposes behind each source and the subsequent realism or fantasy demanded for each purpose.

Although we can never completely ascertain the sources and information that Dante had access to, we can gain a deeper understanding of the intellectual milieu in which he was writing by looking at how his contemporaries react to his references. What we uncover by looking closely at the early commentaries on the *Commedia* is a striking disconnect from the trend in modern scholarship, a trend which is often attributed to the earliest commentaries. Out of the twenty four commentaries considered between 1901 and 2003 fifteen relate the story that medieval Christians believed the founder of Islam to have been a Christian priest who turned on the papacy and founded his own religion. In comparison, only four out of the eighteen earliest commentaries on *Inferno* 28 maintain that Dante believed Maometto was originally a Christian priest or deacon. Before Torraca's 1905 intervention re-introduced the idea to the commentary tradition, the myth had not been mentioned by commentators since the *Chiose cagliaritane* circa 1370.

Earliest Commentaries

It is true that the earliest commentary of Jacopo Alighieri (1322) relates the story of Maometto "grande prelato di Spagna" who had preached abroad and upon learning that he had been denied the papacy returned and preached the opposite, eventually creating the doctrine which would become Islam.¹⁷³ However, as early as 1324 Jacopo della Lana identifies the prophet of Islam "che aveva nome Maometto che era arabo" (whose name was Maometto and who was Arab). He still attributes the impetus for the foundation of Islam to a Christian monk named "Niccolao." According to Lana this monk used the status of Maometto to begin to convert the Arabs to Christianity, but upon hearing that the pope had sent someone else to rule over this newly Christian territory, Niccolao desired to keep all the power for himself and instructed Maometto to present himself as a prophet to the Arabs.¹⁷⁴ While this version of events is still missing a number of the historical facts which were available at the time, it introduces an important distinction in attributing the initial schism to a Christian who was not Maometto. Were we to follow the strict logic used by modern scholars in interpreting this canto, it should be Niccolao who is punished as a schismatic rather than the Arab who was merely following his

¹⁷³ Jacopo Alighieri comments: "grande prelato di Spagna, nominato Maometto, con alcuno suo compagno nominato Ali, qui si concede, il quale anticamente essendo dal papa di Roma alcuna volta mandato oltremare, per invidia di sua facultade con grande inpromissione a predicare [di] Cristo, e con vittoria di fede tornando, e non trovando alle promissione fermo volere, ritornato di là e il contrario predicando ridisse, affermando la credenza che al presente pe' saracini si ritiene."

¹⁷⁴ Lana offers significantly more details in his gloss: "Chiaro appare nel testo. Questo peccatore era Macometto quale fu scismatico della santa Ecclesia in questo modo. Maometto fu scismatico per la iniquità d'uno monaco delle Smirne che ebbe nome Niccolao. Ora è da sapere che il ditto Niccolao fu uno sottilissimo uomo e per cristianismo si mosse e andò alla Mecca che è di Spagna e vicino della Barberia là ove abitano li Mori e giunto s'accostò a uno maggiore del paese che aveva nome Maometto che era arabo e grande uomo. Si mise sotto l'ombra sua e tanto udieno lui e gli altri di quello paese che li redusse alla fede cristiana. Sentì lo papa che il paese era tornato a cristianità si ne ordinò uno patriarca che li governasse. Di che saputo questo lo detto Niccolao avendo speranza d'essere lo maggiore in quelli paesi per la Chiesa e sentendo che l' patriarca venia e sotto quello elli sarebbe, si li pesò molto e misesi a grande iniquità contro sua coscienza, e fu a questo Maometto medesimo che molto li credea perche'elli era uomo di buona fede e di grande coscienza e feceli a credere come Dio l'aveva fatto suo messo per predicare sua novella..... ed isformò la fede cristiana in ogni cosa...."

instructions. Although Lana is certainly evidencing the medieval belief that the similarities between the two religions can be understood by asserting Christian influence on the foundation of Islam, he is not insistent that Maometto himself need to have been Christian in order to be punished as a schismatic.

As we continue through the early commentaries it becomes clear that they have a much looser definition of schism and particularly how Islam created a schism within the church. All redactions of the *Ottimo commento* (1333, 1338) refer to Maometto as “profeta de’ Saracini” (prophet of the Saracens).¹⁷⁵ The *Ottimo* is much more informed than its predecessors, including dates and factual biographical information, like the fact that after his death Muhammad's successor was "Abu[bek]er" (Abu Bakr).¹⁷⁶ Alongside these accurate facts the *Ottimo* contains common myths from the Christian polemical tradition, relating that Maometto made the people believe that his epileptic fits were actually conversations with an Angel and that he was taught by a heretic monk named "Sergio."¹⁷⁷ This commentary goes so far as to negate the false legend that Maometto had originally been a Christian priest, saying “dicono alcuni, ma non è vero, ch’egli fu cardinale” (some say, but it’s not true, that he was a Cardinal).

The third redaction (1338) contains even more correct material, referring to Maometto as "auctore della setta de' presenti saracini" and includes a factual explanation that Muslims traced

¹⁷⁵ *Ottimo* 1333: “Nelli anni del Signore circa DCXXI, essendo papa Onori[o] primo, e imperadore Eraclio, Maometto profeta de' Saracini si levò, il quale fue negromante, e gravato d'infermitade che si chiama epilensia, e fue appostata. Quando per quella infermità cad[ea], acciò che la gente non se n'adesse, facea credere, che allora parlava con l'Angelo.”

¹⁷⁶ 1333: “In sulla malattia ch'elli fece, questo Maometto morì al tempo del detto Imperadore, e dopo lui signoreggiò Abu[bek]er.”

¹⁷⁷ 1333: “e dicesi che costui, essendo capo di certi uomini dati a uccidere e a rubare, per la costoro forza divenne re, e fue amaestrato da uno monaco eretico, ch'ebbe nome Sergio.”

their lineage to Ismael, son of Abraham and Hagar.¹⁷⁸ He provides an accurate retelling of the story of Bahira, the Christian monk who recognized the prophecy of the young Muhammad.¹⁷⁹ D'Ancona explained that many of the stories of Sergio and Niccolao which circulated in medieval Christian sources were based on a corruption of this original story from the Islamic tradition, however this redaction of the *Ottimo commento* retains the story relatively intact. He later reintroduces the figure of "Sergius Nestorianus" and explains that this personage along with an apostate Jew, helped Maometto to construct the Qur'an.¹⁸⁰ The *Ottimo's* ultimate definition of the creation of Islamic doctrine is: "una legge fece in confusione della legge christiana, della legge judaica, della setta paganica" (a law made out of the confusion of Christian law, Jewish Law and the pagan sect).

Up to this point the *Ottimo commento* provides the most well-informed gloss on the canto and shares the most accurate historical information on the Prophet Muhammad and the religion of Islam. Interestingly, this accurate information does not confound the commentator's sense of the significance of Maometto's punishment as a schismatic. In the first redaction Maometto is identified as :

¹⁷⁸ *Ottimo* 1338: "Intorno agl'anni di Christo .vic. nacque in Arabia nella cittade di La-Mecca Mahometto, figl[i]o d'Abimelech, della schiatta d'Ismael figl[i]o d'Abraam et d'Agar sua ancilla, il quale Mahometto fue di vile natione et di povero padre et madre nato et picciolo rimase orfano, fue nudrito in Saligna d'Arabia da uno Ydolatro sacerdote dal quale imprese alquanto di nigromantia; poi cresciuto si mise a servire uno mercatante arabo a menare suoe bestie a vectura e così dimorando et camminando con le dette bestie pervenne a una badia di Christiani ne' confini di Soria et d'Arabia oltre il monte Synay."

¹⁷⁹ 1338: "In quella era uno santo romito christiano nome Bahayra al quale, per revelatione divina, fue mostrato che tra li mercatanti qui inalbergati avea uno garzone del quale parlava la profezia sopra Ysmael .xvi. capitolo del *Genesi* dove dice: «Questi sarae fiero huomo. La mano sua contra tutti et la mano di tutti contra lui»".

¹⁸⁰ 1338: "Acostossi con uno falso christiano nome Giosio overo Sergio, grande scienziato et contumace della Chiesa di Roma il quale gl'insignoe più forte fondare la sua legge, col quale s'acostoe et con uno judeo rinegato; con questi due consiglieri avanzoe sua fama et ordinoe la legge de l'*Alcoran* tracta in parte del *Vecchio Testamento* et in parte del *Nuovo* et in parte della paganesca."

Il quale con la sua scisma hae più danno dato alla Chiesa di Dio, e alla fede cristiana, che nullo, o tra tutti gli altri incomparabilmente.

The one who, with his schism, did more damage to the Church of God, and the Christian faith, than any other or among all the others incomparably more.

Despite knowing that Maometto was not originally a Christian and that the Arabs were not converted to Christianity before the introduction of Islam, this medieval commentator is still of the opinion that Islam had done more damage to the Church than any other schism. If we were to follow the logic of the modern commentators, these two viewpoints should not be able to co-exist.

Around 1337 the Anonimo Selmiano also references a “Malcometto” who first converted the Arabs to Christianity and on the loss of the papacy turned around and preached the opposite of what he had originally taught them.¹⁸¹ The Chiose Cagliaritane (1370)¹⁸² and Anonimo Latino (mid 14th cent)¹⁸³ contain similar stories which describe Maometto as a Spanish priest or

¹⁸¹ “Alì fu compagno di Malcometto, nato de le parti di Banbillonia. Malcometto avia predicata la nostra fede, e recato molta gente a la nostra legge; poi per isdegno ch'ebbe col Papa e col Collegio de' Cardinali, tornò, e ripredicò il contrario, e molto iscandalo e scisma mise contro a nostra fede, come è detto per adietro. E fu cardinale Malcometto, detto cardinale Nicola; ed è vero che 'l Papa in questo tempo morì, e elli mandò a cardinali che lo facessero Papa lui, per lo gran bene ch'avia fatto. I cardinali, vedendolo superbo, non lo fecero, ond'elli come è detto, predicò il contrario ch'avia predicato, e feceli rinegare dicendo: che la nostra era mala fede, e diè loro mala legge; e però mostra Dante ch'egli è fesso e diviso.”

¹⁸² Chiose Cagliaritane: “questo maometto fu de spagna et mandato a predicare per convertire li saracini dal papa. esso maometto convertine molti a la fede christiana poi per alchuno sdegno àuto col lo decto papa disse el contrario ch'elli avia predicato. predicò contra la fede christiana onde per lui tucti se fecero contr' ai christiani più contrari ch'ei non erano stati de prima et adorano maometto per loro idolo mandato da dio etc.”

¹⁸³ Anonimo Latino: “Seminatores scandali dicuntur illi qui separant homines et una fides ab altera; et inter istos sismatos cognoscitur quidem qui fuit cardinalis ecclesie romane et fuit de Yspania; et vocatur Maometus. Qui propter probitatem suam missus fuit ultra mare ut predicaret cristianam fidem cum quodam socio qui vocabatur Ali. Unde cum transitus fuit in predictas partes, papa et cardinales privaverunt eum, et male fecerunt, propter invidiam quam de eo habebant. Unde Maometus et Ali, scientes hoc, predicaverunt fidem quam modo saraceni habent. Unde quia ipsi apparuerunt eis sive (?) illis quidquid intellectu habebant, propter hoc figurative ponitur esse ita a parte, sicut in testu distinguitur; et in tali malo ponuntur omnes similes sismaticos. Et propter hoc recordatur a Maometo frater Dolcino, qui similiter sismaticus fuit.”

cardinal who turned his back on the pope in order to preach his own religion. However, as previously shown, the proportion of early commentaries which espouse a reasonably recognizable account of Muhammad's actual historical formation far outweigh the few commentaries which contain the legend of a rogue Christian prelate who manipulated the Arabs into a false religion.

Francesco da Buti (1385-95) actually addresses the diversity of opinions which he encountered, but affirms that he has selected that which seems true to him (“io ò preso quel che più mi par vero.”) His account begins:

nell'anno DC dalla natività di Cristo al tempo di papa Bonifazio terzo,
e nello imperio d'Onorio; fu nelle parti d'Arabia uno uomo chiamato
Maometto, e questo uomo fu di grande sapere, e fu grande mago

In the year 600 after the birth of Christ at the time of Pope Boniface III
and under the empire of Honorius; there was in the parts of Arabia a
man named Maometto, and this man had great knowledge and was a
great magician

He goes on to describe that as a merchant the Arab Maometto mixed with Christians and Jews, and thereby perfectly learned the laws of both religions. Through this knowledge and his magical abilities he convinced the people that he was sent by God and created a new law by mixing up the laws of Moses and Christ.¹⁸⁴ Sergio enters into Buti's story as an exiled Nestorian heretic who found the famous Maometto and allied himself with him. Maometto then keeps him hidden

¹⁸⁴ Buti explains: “nel tempo della sua giovinezza facea mercatanzia, et usava in Gerusalem et in Egitto; e, come uomo saputo, si domesticava coi Cristiani e co' Giudei, intanto che perfettamente imparò la legge di Moisè e quella di Cristo, e tanto parve di grande sapere a quelli popoli, ch'ebbero fede che fosse messo di Dio, per li miracoli ch'elli faceva per arte magica. E vedendosi in tanto onore, crebbe in superbia e pubblicamente predicava al popolo ch'elli era messia mandato da Dio, et arrecossi a dare nuova legge a quelli popoli, mescolando quella di Moisè con quella di Cristo.”

away and tells the people he is the Angel Gabriel who speaks with the prophet.¹⁸⁵ Buti relates that other sources (“altrove si legge”) identify Sergio as a Jacobite Archdeacon of Antioch, thwarted in his papal aspirations. The third possibility he presents that others say (altri dicono) is the story of the Monk who had originally preached Christianity in Arabia, but then returned and connected himself with Maometto in order to convince the Arabs to leave Christianity and follow a new law.¹⁸⁶ Through his framing, Buti suggests that the last story is the least reliable, although he has heard it so he relates it along with the other possible stories.

Buti is less certain what to do with the figure of Ali. He relates that “secondo ch’io truovo, fu discepolo di Maometto” (according to what I find, he was a disciple of Maometto) but he rejects this identification and posits that Ali was the cleric who was said in Western tradition to have taught the young Maometto because he walks in front. Buti goes so far as to hypothesize that perhaps “Ali” is how you say teacher in their language.¹⁸⁷ Ultimately Buti concludes by asking forgiveness from his reader due to the difficulty of finding adequate information to accurately gloss this verse: “Di queste istorie m’abbi scusato tu, lettore, che non se ne può trovare verità certa” (for these stories please excuse me, reader, since one cannot find the certain truth). Buti’s preoccupation with finding the story which appears true to him and his frustration

¹⁸⁵ Buti clarifies: “Concorse ancora a quel tempo che, levandosi molti eretici, uno monaco chiamato Sergia entrato nella setta di Nestorio eretico, cacciato del monasterio pervenne in Arabia, e trovandovi Maometto già famoso, aggiunsesi a lui, e come molto saputo lo ammaestrava in tutte cose; e Maometto lo teneva rinchiuso, e dicea ch’era l’Angelo Gabriello che li parlava.”

¹⁸⁶ Buti relates this story without fully subscribing to it: “et altri dicono che questo monaco fosse mandato dalla Chiesa ad ammaestrare quelli popoli d’Arabia nella fede, e promessoli lo cappello; e tornando poi e non essendoli attenuto, si ritornò in Arabia et accostossi a Maometto, et indusselo a dire nuova legge, e partirsi dalla legge de’ Cristiani. E per questo modo tanto crebbe Maometto, che fu reputato nell’Arabia, e nello Egitto e per quelli reami vicini, messia di Dio; e pigliavalo spesso la gotta caduca, e cadendo in terra, dicea quando si levava, che gli era apparito l’Angelo Gabriello; e perchè non potea patire lo suo splendore, però venia meno, e morì nelli anni Domini DCXXI a mezzo luglio.”

¹⁸⁷ Buti specifies: “ma per quel ch’io credo, elli fu quel cherico che l’ammaestrò, lo quale elli chiama Ali, forse perchè in quella lingua così si chiama il maestro; e questo mi fa credere la pena diversa che l’autor finge ch’egli abbia, che se fosse stato suo discepolo, non li avrebbe dato diversa pena da Maometto.”

with the difficulty of finding “verità certa,” attests to the plethora of sources which were available at the time, and the fact that medieval readers were not ignorantly accepting any legend they came across, but were weighing the veracity of the various versions of the story and interested in ascertaining which was closest to the truth.

There is also no reason to believe that commentators on the *Commedia* were particularly interested in information about Islam and might have had no reason to seek it before they came to these verses which needed to be glossed. Conversely, the poet is very carefully mapping out his *Inferno* and determining the best way to represent the various sins and would have thought deeply about the choices he is making and what they represent. In fact, from about the sixteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth commentators merely report the historical facts surrounding the prophet Muhammad and take no interest in deeply analyzing the significance of his punishment or what it tells us about Dante’s views of the Islamic world. While we look to Dante’s earliest commentators to get a close approximation of how his contemporaries responded to his poem, they cannot always be relied on to accurately represent how the poet himself conceived of his artistic choices or the sources he used.

In espousing their views on *Inferno* 28, many modern commentators and scholars confidently refer back to the earliest commentaries as a homogenous source of proof, without taking into account the disparities between them and the fact that they cannot be guaranteed to accurately represent the totality of ideas which existed at Dante’s time. In her encyclopedia entry on “Islam and Islamic Culture,” Suzanne Conklin Akbari argues that “Dante’s identification of Ali as a schismatic implies that Islam itself is a form of Christianity, albeit a perverted one.” In support of this argument she then groups a number of medieval commentators to serve as collective proof of her argument:

J. Alighieri (1322), della Lana (1324), *Ottimo* (1333) and (most elaborately) *Anonimo Fiorentino* (1400) repeat the popular story that Muhammad was a Christian cleric who, when frustrated in his effort to achieve the papacy, satisfied his lust for power by founding his own religious sect.¹⁸⁸

First of all, a selection of only four early commentators is not adequate to gain an understanding of the fourteenth century responses to the *Commedia*. It is even more striking that her description of the commentaries of della Lana and *Ottimo* is not even true. As we have seen della Lana does include a Christian cleric, but he is a separate figure from Maometto, and the *Ottimo* includes the popular story only so that he can negate it (“dicono alcuni, ma non è vero”).

After declaring that Ali’s punishment necessitates Dante’s belief that Islam is a form of Christianity, Akbari goes on to argue that Dante’s treatment of Ali, and the early commentators’ confusion surrounding it “illustrates the poet’s more subtle understanding of the theological relationship between Christianity and Islam.” As we have already seen, Dante cannot simultaneously believe that Muhammad was a frustrated Christian cleric and also have a nuanced understanding of the doctrine of Islam, including the role of Ali in Islamic history. If he is actually following sources such as the *Liber Nicholay*, and not just aware of their literary existence, he is basing his depiction on very little accurate information. If he is aware of more sophisticated sources which would inform him of Ali’s relationship to the prophet and his role in the Sunni/ Shia divide, those same sources would have disabused him of the idea that Islam was founded by a Christian.

In a 2015 article on “Islamic and Jewish Influences,” Luis Giròn Negròn describes the 14th and 15th century commentaries as containing:

a diverse *florilegium* of colourful anti-Islamic legends about the ‘historical’ Muhammad as a lascivious renegade Christian and impostor, a trickster and

¹⁸⁸ She also bolsters her claims with a footnote citing D’Ancona.

pseudo-prophet who deceived his followers with sham miracles, an apostate cardinal with a frustrated ambition for the Papacy, and so on... (210)

While this may be an accurate summary of the various stories related in the commentaries we have discussed, he fails to account for the significance of the differences between them, as if all medieval legends are just different styles of preposterous fabrications. Ultimately he comes to the same conclusion that Dante must have believed Islam was just a perversion of Christianity and not an independently formed religion. Negròn supports this by specifically focusing on the dragon of *Purgatorio* 32. This dragon is one of seven events in the history of the church represented in an allegory performed at the top of the mountain of purgatory. The church is represented by a *carro*, or chariot, and the dragon emerges from the ground before using its tail to rip off the floor of the chariot and carry a part of it away. This fourth event in the history of the church is commonly interpreted as representing Muhammad or the effects of Islam on Christianity. Negròn argues:

the violent rupture of the chariot's floor by the venomous tail of a dragon as a reference to the divisive impact of Islam on the Church's mystical body — seems to highlight a Christian indictment of Prophet Muhammad not as the founder of a new 'religion' but as a quintessential schismatic.

Unsurprisingly, just as modern commentators are confused by Maometto's identification as a schismatic in *Inferno* 28, here too they cannot see how the foundation of Islam could be a significant event in the history of Christianity if it was not initially a part of the church. However, if we look closely at this episode and the imagery the poet creates, we can see that his representation is more nuanced and requires a historicized understanding of the medieval context and the various ways in which Islam was represented.

Purgatorio 32: Allegory of the Schism

As previously described, the dragon is part of a larger performance of seven major events in the history of the Church, which is represented by a chariot, from its beginnings up until Dante's time. The chariot is first attacked by "l'uccel di Giove" (the eagle of Jove, [*Pur.* 32.112]), which represents the early Roman emperors' persecution of Christianity.¹⁸⁹ Then a fox "che d'ogne pasto buon pareo digiuna" (that seemed to lack all honest nourishment, [*Pur.* 32.120]) jumps into the body of the chariot but is chased away by Beatrice. This fox represents the early heresies of the church which were eventually overcome, as they make no significant change to the chariot.¹⁹⁰ The eagle then returns, this time dropping its feathers on the chariot, which remain stuck to it. The feathers represent the church's acquisition of wealth through the Donation of Constantine.¹⁹¹ Suddenly something quite different happens. The poet describes:

Poi parve a me che la terra s'aprisse	Then the ground between the two wheels seemed
Tra ambo le ruote, e vidi uscirne un drago	to me to open; from the earth, a dragon emerged
	<i>Pur.</i> 32. 130-131

Over the course of the commentary tradition, this dragon is almost unanimously connected to the figure of Maometto and the influence of Islam. What is most significant for our reading of this image is *how* Dante describes the appearance of the dragon and its relationship to the chariot

¹⁸⁹ Hollander provides the historical context of this persecution: "beginning with Nero (54-68) while Peter was its first pope (and was crucified in the emperor's persecution of Christians ca. A.D. 68), and extending to the reign of Diocletian (284-305)."

¹⁹⁰ Chiavacci Leonardi explains: "si figura qui la vittoria della vera dottrina cristiana (Beatrice, *la donna mia*) che mette in fuga gli eretici confutando i loro errori (*riprendendo* la volpe delle sue turpi colpe) per opera dei dottori della Chiesa." (represented here is the victory of true Christian doctrine (Beatrice, *my lady*) which scares away the heretics, confuting their errors (*reprimanding* the fox for its vile crimes) by the works of the doctors of the Church.)

¹⁹¹ Chiavacci Leonardi reminds us of the importance Dante places on this event: "è giudicato da Dante, come già sappiamo, l'evento più grave per l'«humana civilitas», in quanto «distrusse» l'ordine divino del mondo (*Par.* XX 60) e porta a rovina l'umanità, a cui viene a mancare la duplice guida nelle cose terrene e in quelle divine."

which represents the church. Although modern commentators would have us believe that Dante and his contemporaries consider Islam to have been a schism created by a Christian from within the body of the church, the dragon which symbolizes this schism emerges from “the ground between the two wheels.” Were Dante truly convinced that the religion of Islam was the creation of a Christian priest, we would expect the monster representing it to emerge from within the body of the *carro* itself following the logic of the allegory already established during the illustration of the earlier phases of the Church’s history.

Similar to the commentary tradition on Maometto in *Inferno* 28, we can see a marked difference in emphasis on the significance of this imagery based on the time period in which the commentator is writing. Of the eleven commentaries written before 1500, eight are certain that this dragon represents Maometto and the impact of the foundation of Islam on Christianity.¹⁹² The *Chiose Cagliaritanne* is alone in identifying this figure as a “re tiranno” and both *L’Ottimo Commento* (1333) and Pietro Alighieri (1340) merely connect this dragon to a description from the book of the Apocalypse. *L’Ottimo* does not attempt to identify this figure historically but merely states “Questi fu il maggiore persecutore, che la Chiesa e il popolo di Dio avesse mai” (this was the greatest persecutor that the Church and the people of God ever had). Pietro

¹⁹² All commentaries accessed at *Dartmouth Dante Lab* with the exception of the *Anonimo Latino*, consulted in Cioffari (1989).

more explicitly defines this dragon as a representation of the Antichrist and supports his assertion with multiple biblical citations.¹⁹³

However, as just noted, the majority of the early commentators are certain of the dragon's identification with Maometto and go on to delve into the significance of Dante's imagery. Jacopo della Lana explains that the dragon appears precisely between the two wheels of the *carro* because they represent the Old and New testaments and the way in which Maometto based his law on knowledge of both.¹⁹⁴ Francesco da Buti explains his appearance from the ground because Maometto was associated with earthly things and was known to be a Necromancer.¹⁹⁵ Most importantly, all of these commentators describe the relationship between Christianity and Islam without any need to clarify that the historical figure Muhammad was originally a Christian priest who invented a new religion. Lana clearly states that the religion of Islam took things from the old and new testaments. Francesco da Buti identifies the schism represented as "lo scisma che fece Maomet per consillio di Sergio monaco eretico" (the schism which Maometto created based on the advice of Sergio, heretical monk).

It must be noted that we do not have commentaries on *Purgatorio* 32 from three of the four early commentaries which related the story of Maometto the rogue Spanish priest. However, the *Anonimo Latino* also identifies the dragon as Maometto and gives the same explanation as

¹⁹³ Both *L'Ottimo* and Pietro connect Maometto with the fox which is generally considered to represent the heresies which afflicted the early church. *L'Ottimo* is less certain stating: "vogliono alcuni, che questi fosse Maometto: altri vogliono in generale, che sia la eretica pravitate." Pietro is more explicit: "Vulpes, de qua subdit, figurat impetum Maomethi." Considering that the rest of the events are in chronological order, it would not make much sense for Dante to have placed the fourth century Donation of Constantine before the seventh century foundation of Islam. Regardless, both of these commentators were well aware of Maometto's Arab origin in their gloss on *Inferno* 28 and attributed his creation of Islam merely to his knowledge of Christian and Jewish scriptures rather than his original identity as a Christian.

¹⁹⁴ Lana specifies: "Maometto con argomenti del vecchio e nuovo testamento fece sua persuasione."

¹⁹⁵ Buti explains: "imperò che Maometto fu omo molto terreno e fu nigromantico."

Lana of the two wheels as signifying the two testaments, but does not repeat the explanation of the Christian priest myth, merely concluding that Maometto was guilty of attracting many away from the Christian faith through falsehood and deception.¹⁹⁶ Of the eight early commentaries which identify the dragon with Maometto, five revisit the story of a Christian named Sergius or Nicolaio who taught an Arab named Maometto some of the scriptures and together they “tricked” the Saracens into following a new religion.¹⁹⁷ The other three merely explain that Maometto took pieces from the old and new testaments to construct a new religion and used that religion to attract people away from Christianity¹⁹⁸, which is explicitly illustrated in the dragon’s next act:

che per lo carro sù la coda fisse;
e come vespa che ritragge l’ago,
a sé traendo la coda maligna,
trasse del fondo, e gissen vago vago

it drove its tail up through the chariot;
and like a wasp when it retracts its sting,
drawing its venomous tail back to itself,
it dragged part of the bottom off, and went
its way, undulating
Pur. 32. 132-135

It is significant that at no point in this description is the dragon inside the chariot, unlike the fox which represented early Christian heresies and quite literally jumped inside.¹⁹⁹ The only association between Islam and the church is represented by the proximity of the dragon to the wheels which represent the old and new testaments, and the moment when the wasplike tail grabs onto the bottom of the chariot and pulls it away. This perfectly illustrates Dante’s view of Islam as the most significant threat to Christian unity within the history of the church, without

¹⁹⁶ Cioffari, 214: *Macomettus seduxit et ad sua ydola traxit multos Christi fideles suis falsis adulacionibus et deceptionibus.*

¹⁹⁷ Chiose Ambrosiane (1370), Benvenuto da Imola (1375-80), Francesco da Buti (1385-95), Chiose Vernon (1390?), Anonimo Fiorentino (1400).

¹⁹⁸ Jacopo della Lana (1322), Anonymus Lombardus/ Latino (c. 1325), Cristoforo Landino (1481).

¹⁹⁹ The fox is described in *Purgatorio* 32.118-119: “Poscia vidi avventarsi ne la cuna / del triunfal veicolo una volpe” (I then saw, as it leaped into the body of that triumphal chariot, a fox).

the necessity for Islam to come from within Christianity in order for it to be considered the worst schism. In support of this reading, it is also crucial that none of his contemporary commentators makes any reference to the medieval belief that Islam was founded by a rogue Christian in connection to this imagery, nor do they deem it necessary to explain the damage that Islam did to Christianity if its founder was not originally a Christian. They all still follow the medieval doctrine which explained the similarities of Islam and Christianity by reference to Maometto's deceptive manipulation of the truth to attract followers and occasionally refer to a specific Christian teacher who helped the Arab construct his religion. However, at no point does any of them insist that the dragon must come from within the body of the church in order to tear away a part of it.

Unsurprisingly, the same modern commentators who considered Maometto's placement amongst the schismatics in *Inferno* 28 problematic, also rely on the same position in order to explain what they consider confusing about the dragon of *Purgatorio* 32. John S. Carroll's 1904 commentary reminds his readers: "The mediaeval view of Mohammed was not that he was the founder of a new religion: he was one of the worst of heretics, the creator of a vast schism in the Christian Church."²⁰⁰ Similarly, Torraca in 1905 reminds his readers that even St. Thomas considered Muhammad a heretic, citing a passage from *Summa contra Gentiles*. Although modern commentators are less interested in the image of the dragon than they were in the figure of Maometto, those who do relate the identification of the dragon with Maometto continue on the same track as Carroll and Torraca in explaining that Dante didn't really think of Islam as a new religion, but rather as a schism or heresy within Christianity, often citing their gloss on *Inferno*

²⁰⁰ Carroll then goes on to cite Arthur Stanley's 1884 *Lectures on the History of the Eastern Church* as proof of the universality of this medieval viewpoint.

28. However, none of these explanations account for the actual imagery used by the poet in crafting this allegory, particularly the dragon's appearance from the ground and not from the *carro* which represents the church and from which an internal schism should arise.

In his 1864 commentary Luigi Bennassuti provides a strong reading of the significance of the dragon's appearance which deconstructs the false assumptions which begin to pervade the commentary tradition at the beginning of the twentieth century:

Per descrivere Maometto e le sue opere sozze lo fa uscir dalla terra che s'apre... e non dalla cuna del carro, come l'eresia, per indicare che il Maomettismo non è propriamente un' eresia sorta da un uomo appartenente alla Chiesa, ma è un sistema di religione tutto nuovo creato da un uomo estraneo alla Chiesa

To describe Maometto and his filthy works he makes it come from the ground which opens...and not from the body of the chariot, like the heresy, to indicate that *Mohammedanism is not really a type of heresy from a man who is part of the Church, but is a completely new system of religion created by a man outside the church* (emphasis mine)

Although Bennassuti is writing at a time when commentators are fully aware of the historical facts of Islam, he clearly describes how medieval thinkers could relate to Islam as the greatest offense to Christianity without that offense necessarily deriving from Islam's origins within Christianity.

Natalino Sapegno suggested just such a reading in his 1955 commentary, but unfortunately the vast majority of scholars who came after him followed on the path set by D'Ancona and Torraca rather than heeding Sapegno's insight:

Era sufficiente, perché Dante lo condannasse qui, il fatto che con il suo errore egli aveva creato una frattura profonda e cruenta nella società e un ostacolo grave al compimento dell'unità religiosa di tutti gli uomini.

The fact that with his error he created a profound and fierce fracture in society and a grave obstacle to the fulfillment of religious unity of all men was enough for Dante to condemn him here.

Sapegno's explanation mirrors more closely how medieval commentators approach the topic, although it appears that the rationality of this short phrase was not enough to stem the obsession over theological terminology which we find in the modern commentaries. Guido da Pisa in his 1328 commentary defines schism as "peccatum quo quis aliquem vel aliquos ab unitate Ecclesie separat" (the sin by which someone separates one or more people from the unity of the Church). This definition is much less rigid than the Catholic Encyclopedia's description of a person who severs the ties which bind *him* to the church. It also leaves room for the possibility that anyone could author a schism which affected the church, even if that person was not himself a member of it.

In spite of the fact that Islam might not fit the doctrinal definition of a schism or heresy, medieval Christians still believed that both its theological falsehood and its worldly success needed to be addressed in strong terms and in the face of the very real threat which it represented. Modern readers may expect to see a degree of tolerance or acceptance in the face of alternate belief systems, but at Dante's time the bible was not just a source of theology, but also history, science and geography. Therefore, the emergence of Islam needed to be contextualized within this biblical view of the world. There was no possibility of seeing Islam as something outside of Christianity and therefore it must always be defined in relation to it. For this reason, they often interpreted Muhammad as the Anti-Christ, based on how it is described in the scriptures, or saw the religion as coming straight from the devil, powerfully illustrated in the dragon of *Purgatorio* 32 as it rises up from the bowels of the earth.

Norman Daniel explains how the particular relationship medieval Christians had to Islam clearly led them to define it as a heresy: "ancient usage called any attack on some part of faith, even outside the Church, heresy, and Muslims, in the usual way of heretics, took what they liked

from the sum of Christian doctrine, and rejected as much as they disliked” (212). Peter the Venerable questioned in a letter to Bernard whether Muslims should be referred to as “heretics or heathens” (Daniel, 212). Peter’s deep familiarity with Islam ensured that he knew they were not heretics in the traditional sense, but many at the time argued that the similarities between the two religions, as well as the Muslim belief in Mary and Jesus (despite their denial of his divinity), made Islamic beliefs more threatening and therefore heretical. Ultimately, the term heresy won out in popular discourse, although Daniel admits that “neither at Cluny, nor elsewhere, did polemicists take the canonical position into account; a Muslim, unlike a heretic, had not been baptised and was not liable to penalties for leaving the church” (213).

The fact that medieval authors felt no compulsion to only use the term heresy literally can also be seen by the fact that it was even possible to deem Jews as heretics, despite the fact that their religious beliefs predated Christianity. Jeremy Cohen explains how the relationship between Jews and Christians changed over the course of the Middle Ages and how this change led the Jews who had previously enjoyed a kind of protected status to become enemies of the church. In the early Middle Ages Augustine had preached that Jews should be allowed to live amongst Christians to serve as exempla of the Old Testament. However, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Christian thinkers discovered that “rabbinic Judaism was not the Judaism of the Old Testament” (362). This led to an attack on the Talmud because it was determined that “Talmudic Judaism did not hold true to the biblical faith and observance, the toleration of which Augustine had repeatedly preached” (325). This in turn created a new view of “the Jew of the Talmud-heretic, deliberate unbeliever, agent of Satan, and enemy of God, his revelation, and his church” (363). In this case, Christian thinkers were willing to label practicing Jews as “heretics” because the way in which they practiced their faith did not conform to the way in which

Christians understood it. This ludicrous logic could just as easily be applied to Muslims who Christians knew were practicing a completely different religion, but with tenets which were uncomfortably close to Christianity and demanded condemnation in the strongest terms.

Dante is not as lazy as many of his contemporaries in generally referring to Islam as some kind of heresy. For him, it is important to identify Islam specifically for the schismatic effect it had on society, rather than just its general lack of adherence to Christian beliefs. In this regard, Dante's concern is less theological than the Cluniacs and other polemicists; he is more focused on the social and geographical implications of the rise of Islam. It is also important to note that the question of the role of Islam might not have been so urgent and so oft discussed had Islamic societies not been so powerful and successful. The Christian loss of the Holy Land in 1291 was still within recent memory and, as we have seen in previous chapters, growing Islamic influence was felt in the economic and cultural spheres of society. In accounting for Dante's definition of Islam as a schism, Daniel gives a powerful explanation for the significance of this choice:

Islam effectively dominated a large part of the world, which it disputed with all kinds of religions. It was not only historically the great robber of the Christian provinces now lost to the Church; it was the greatest single obstacle to world unity. The dominant consideration was practical. The society that geographically separated the Roman Church from the new Mongol power was also that which seduced the souls of the same Mongols from a possible Roman allegiance. *All schism is error and all error was thought of as in a sense schismatic.* Every soul belongs to the Roman Church, from which it may be separated both formally and by erroneous tenets; the two go together. (218, emphasis mine)

By understanding the specifics of the historical context and the different ways in which the threat of Islam was felt by Western medieval Christians, we can see that Dante's choices in the punishment of the founder of Islam were based on much more than theological categories. While modern scholarship is preoccupied with the definition of schism and the supposed ignorance of

medieval Christians, it completely ignores the actual social, cultural and geopolitical reality which Islam represented for fourteenth century Europe.

We have seen how the various ways in which medieval Christians chose to represent Islam had much more to do with their own concerns and interests than an objective vision of the religion. This leads to some sources offering more factual and historically correct information than others, depending on the aims and ambitions of the author. In almost every context the figure of Muhammad and his biography were made the primary source which authors could use to attack and denigrate his religion. However, Daniel reminds us that objectivity and adherence to complete historical truth were rarely seen as the aim: “It seemed more reasonable to decide that what suited the author’s purpose was true, provided his purpose was a sufficiently laudable one, than to decide according to the abstract reliability of his sources of information” (274). In fact, this same method could be ascribed to the modern scholars who so willingly accept the explanation of Dante’s Maometto which best fits their understanding of him. Many commentators of the early twentieth century are eager to disassociate Dante from any particular knowledge of Islam in order to prove that he could not possibly have been inspired by Arabic sources. Twenty-first century scholars like Akbari, Coggeshall and Negròn are conversely interested in tracing evidence of connections and cross-cultural understanding, and the identification of Maometto as a previous Christian can be used to deconstruct the notion that medieval Christians only ever thought of Islam as a foreign, hostile “other.” In reality, consultation of medieval sources and close reading of the early commentaries shows that the truth is somewhere in the middle. We have determined that it was not necessary for Dante and his contemporaries to ascribe Christian origins to the foundation of Islam in order to see the religion as a schism and heresy. However, Western Christian sources universally saw the

similarities between Islam and Christianity as evidence that Islam was merely a false religion based on the manipulation of the old and new testaments. By employing this more nuanced understanding of how medieval Christians represented and engaged with Islam, we can ensure that our reading of Dante's Maometto is not based on anachronistic modern assumptions but rather fully engaged with the diverse cultural milieu in which Dante was writing.

Conclusion.

(Re)Reading Dante's Geography and Pursuing Digital Directions

This study has engaged with Dante's geography from multiple perspectives by incorporating an understanding of medieval mapping technologies, historicizing the wide variety of geographical references made by the poet and redefining what a geocritical reading of the *Commedia* can be. In order to demonstrate the potential of this approach, this study has engaged most explicitly with representations of the world beyond Europe, both through a consideration of the references made by the poet and also by showing how those references can appear in unexpected yet enlightening ways. By combining a macroscopic approach to Dante's worldview with a microscopic reading of particular episodes like those of Ulysses and Maometto, we have seen the various ways in which a geocritical reading can be applied to the *Commedia* and how these diverse approaches can coexist and contribute to a greater understanding of Dante's relationship to geography and cartography. Geographical significance within the poem has been explored from the literal level of places named to the less tangible but equally important way in which geographical ideas impact intellectual understandings of the world. The types of data which have been consulted in constructing this geographical reading ranged from specific points on a map, critical analyses of the social and political significance of mapping technology, as well as evaluating representations of Islamic culture to uncover their significance in understanding the poet's worldview.

This project grew and developed out of an interest in the debate surrounding Dante and Islam, particularly the way in which that debate so often seemed overdetermined by the

outcomes individual scholars hoped to find rather than guided by what the text offered. The effort to avoid this type of overdetermination inspired a close attention to geographical references to the Islamic world as a concrete means of measuring the poet's interest in and knowledge of foreign places which may not take pride of place in his poem, but still have more than a passing relevance. Initially, the intention was to follow Franco Moretti's distant reading methodology of extracting references from the text and creating a representation which would possess "emerging qualities." However, the attempt led to the realization that such an approach would be inadequate for taking into account the sheer amount of culture and history implicit in Dante's references, most of which is practically inaccessible to the modern reader without extensive commentaries and historical research.

By studying previous approaches to mapping or analyzing Dante's geography we can see the limitations of these earlier methods and identify areas for improvement. Mary Hensman's 1892 *Dante Map* provides an important resource by collecting all of the places named throughout the poet's writings. However, it is interesting to note that in the informational booklet which accompanies her map she chose to divide her references between those in Italy and those outside of Italy, manifesting perhaps the nationalism of her own time rather than the historical reality of what Italy would have looked like for Dante. Revelli in 1922 evidences a similar conception of how Dante's geography should be organized, including sections on "Le terre che Dante vide" (The Lands that Dante saw) and "Confini e regioni d'Italia nel pensiero di Dante" (Borders and Regions of Italy in Dante's Thought) as well as "L'Italia nella *Divina Commedia*" (Italy in the Divine Comedy). While Hensman's choices seem to reflect a general nationalist sentiment at the time, Revelli's entire project is explicitly inspired by a desire to exalt the greatness of the

poet, but at the same time the greatness of Italy.²⁰¹ Not only does Revelli argue that Dante's geographical knowledge was of the highest caliber, he also sees in it a foreshadowing of the formation of the future nation of Italy. In his preface he argues that Dante, defined as "il maggiore poeta di nostra gente" (the greatest poet of our people,) divined the future nation of Italy as it would be formed in the nineteenth century.²⁰²

In the analyses of Hensman and Revelli we see a strong nationalist sentiment influencing their emphasis on what is important in the geography of the poem. Similarly, attempts to address Dante's relationship to Islam on a geographical level have been plagued by overdetermined conceptions of how this relationship should manifest itself in geographical references. For Revelli it is important to Italy's image that Dante be a well-informed geographer so that his poem can be seen to foreshadow Italian greatness. However, we have seen that the opposite approach can also be employed, such as in Giuseppe Gabrieli's 1921 attempt to distance the poet from any specific or deep interest in the Islamic world. In his preface Gabrieli informs his reader that he is particularly addressing this work to the debate on Dante's potential connections to "oriental" literatures which some maintain served as source material for the *Commedia*.²⁰³ Immediately afterwards he congratulates those who have maintained their faith in the originality and

²⁰¹ In his preface he defines his project: "a esaltare la grandezza del Poeta,e, insieme, la grandezza della Patria" (unnumbered).

²⁰² Revelli describes: "La suggestiva forza che, nella divinazione dantesca d'una nazione italica, ha l'indistruttibile ossatura unitaria della nostra terra, chiusa fra la zona dei versanti alpini e l'azzurra cintura delle sue marine, cuore dell'Impero, area centrale d'irradiazione civile per necessità di posizione geografica, per maestà di tradizione storica, si rivelò meta ardua, ma di vasti orizzonti, quali intese e vide il maggiore poeta di nostra gente." (unnumbered preface).

²⁰³ Gabrieli describes his topic as: "intorno ad un argomento che di recente ha interessato, fors'anche appassionato, gli studiosi di Dante e il pubblico colto, al quale particolarmente il mio scritto s'indirizza: la questione cioè dei probabili o possibili rapporti letterari, o nessi genetici, fra la *Divina Commedia* e le letterature orientali, affermati e sostenuti da alcuni, negati ed esclusi da altri." (unnumbered preface).

supremacy of “nostro primo e maggior Poeta nazionale” (our first and great national poet).²⁰⁴

Both Revelli and Gabrieli are keen to venerate the singularity of Italy’s national poet, although they approach the task from different directions. What is interesting for our purposes is Gabrieli’s geographical section in which he includes a complete list of all the places within the Islamic world which are referenced by Dante.²⁰⁵ Unlike the geographer Revelli, Gabrieli is not particularly interested in how Dante knew some of these more obscure places or what cartographic knowledge he would have had of them. Instead he uses what he considers a paltry number of references to argue for Dante’s limited knowledge of the Islamic world, emphasizing that Dante’s eastern geography is limited to the most famous places, either due to their coastal location or literary and historical importance.²⁰⁶

This overdetermined reading of the poet’s relationship to the Islamic world is something that we have seen throughout scholarship on the topic. In analyzing such scholarship we have seen that the ideological significance of the discussion surrounding Dante and Islam often has more weight on the resulting analysis than the poet’s actual materials. Even more recent studies like Schildgen’s *Dante and the Orient* are limited by their explicit insistence on a surface-level approach to the geography of the Islamic world, as evidenced by the title’s inclusion of the term

²⁰⁴ He continues: “forse non riescirà inutile e sgradita agli studiosi e ammiratori di Dante (non dovremmo esserlo tutti oggi, specialmente in Italia?), a quanti, senza diventare idolatri, hanno avuto e conservato fede salda nella originalità e sovranità del nostro primo e maggior Poeta nazionale.” (Perhaps it will not be useless and unappreciated by the students and admirers of Dante (should we not all be such today, especially in Italy?), by how much, without becoming idolators, they have had and preserved steady faith in the originality and sovereignty of our first and great national poet, [unnumbered preface]).

²⁰⁵ See Gabrieli pages 37-41 for this list.

²⁰⁶ “Si può tuttavia ritenere, com’era da supporre apriori, che la geografia orientale di Dante si limitasse ai paesi circummediterranei, abbracciando i luoghi, e particolarmente gli scali, per ragioni letterarie o storiche più noti o più importanti” (41).

“the Orient.” This dissertation has shown that geographical engagement with the world of Islam goes far beyond references to places which are associated with Muslims. The expansive methodology employed herein can be applied to other geocritical readings of the poem’s vast store of references. A reading of the poem’s geography based on the historicity of the references it contains, rather than modern assumptions about what the poet knew and what interested him, will lead to more nuanced approaches to understanding the world of the *Commedia*.

This project has incorporated nuance and broadened our idea of a geographical reading in a number of ways. The first chapter established the necessity for a historically sensitive geocritical approach. Upon reviewing the literature it became evident that previous readings of Dante’s geography had only looked at references and source materials without embracing the all-encompassing nature of a truly geographical reading. We saw the limitations of surface-level approaches to the poem’s geography. It was shown how explicit references to Muslims or places with which they are associated can often provide less information on the poet’s worldview than historicized references to places within Italy and Europe that can be seen to have important connections to the Islamic world. In order to fully understand the relevance of a reference it must be historically contextualized to appreciate the context which would have been evident to Dante’s first readers. However, we cannot read references in a vacuum, they must be incorporated into a broader understanding in order to contribute to a geocritical mode of engagement. Dante’s geographical references are seen to always have deep and complex significance which requires considerable elucidation in order to bring such importance to the surface.

The way in which Dante constructs the geography of his worldview within the narrative of the poem is most explicitly explored in chapter two. As the poet defines the parameters of his

world these are in direct relation to the explanation of the journey he is taking and how it relates to the world of lived experience. The centrality of Jerusalem is important to the world that the poet is constructing and can be understood as a topos within the context of the poem. However, it is important to contextualize the idea within its larger cartographical history, a history which was happening outside the realm of literature but which certainly influenced the worldview which inspired Dante. Similarly, the location of the Earthly Paradise at the top of Dante's mountain of purgatory has important significance for his philosophy of the afterlife. However, we have also seen how fundamentally this choice changes his representation of the East in comparison to his contemporaries. While most medieval *mappaemundi* maintain the East as a fundamentally unknowable region, straddling the "real" world and the afterlife, Dante can consider the question of the fate of a simple inhabitant of India. He has transformed the East from a realm of exoticism and mythology to a place where the inhabitants are only differentiated from Europeans by their lack of access to Christianity and not physical deformities or outlandish habits.

Not only does Dante reconceptualize the representation of the world most prevalent among his contemporaries, he also evidences his knowledge of the most current modes of representing geographical knowledge. This reading goes beyond former assertions that Dante knew navigational charts or had heard reports of early Atlantic explorational voyages. By fully inscribing the poet's navigational references within their historical and cultural context we come to appreciate their significance beyond the individual reference or episode within the poem. Chapter three reminds us that Dante's poetry and philosophy is part of a society undergoing an incredible amount of social and economic upheaval, mostly caused by mercantile expansion throughout the Mediterranean. Without fully situating Dante's poem within this broader context,

we cannot understand the implications of his references to the mercantile spheres and how these relate to his larger concept of geography and more specifically his understanding of the Islamic world.

We have identified the economic and cultural significance of expanding trade as well as European martial efforts beyond Christian lands. However, such a consideration would be incomplete without also looking at the theological implications of this cross-cultural awareness. By doing so we see that theology is never separate from economic and political concerns, both in the Middle Ages as well as the modern era. In chapter four we see more specifically the geographical stakes behind representing the founder of Islam. Modern scholars have introduced a discussion surrounding Dante's awareness of the details on Islam and specifically the question of the origins of the religion's founder. While the contemporary view holds that Dante's Maometto was originally a European Christian priest, medieval commentaries and sources do not support the necessity of this reading. An analysis of the critical tradition gives us more insight into the state of modern scholarship on Christian-Muslim relations than it does on the medieval context in which Dante's poem was composed. A consideration of that context shows that the relationships between trade, crusade, material culture and theology are much closer than we might have initially believed. There were certainly theological reasons for Christian scholars and thinkers to take issue with Islamic doctrines and beliefs. However, the intensity of their critique as well as the urgency with which it was spread shows their preoccupation with the temporal and economic power of Muslim lands rather than any fear of the theological influence of Islam. Dante's choice to depict Maometto and Ali as schismatics evidences this awareness of the

temporal power of Islamic lands and the threat they posed to Christian unity, not in a theological sense but in the power they exerted over trade, goods and lands rich in resources.

Beyond their identification as schismatics, we find another important piece of evidence as to how the poet conceived of the specific threat posed by the doctrine of Maometto. This is particularly evident when we look more closely at his choice to have Maometto address the northern Italian heretic Fra Dolcino. By comparing the ways in which Islamic doctrine and Dolcinian heresy were depicted in contemporary sources at his time, we see that European anxieties about heresy and schism were more affected by such threats closer to home than they were by the distant and ambiguous foreign religion of Islam. If anything, Islam is invoked due to its similarities to European heresies like those of the *apostolici* in Italy which posed a more immediate threat to the cultural unity so desired by Dante. While he is aware of the rhetorical power of using Maometto and Ali to represent the larger concept of schism and lack of religious unity, he is more interested in the specific and current threat posed by the philosophies espoused by Dolcino which were causing crusades to be launched in the hills outside of Novara.

This project serves as an initial example of the ways in which a geocritical reading can be fruitfully applied to the *Commedia*. We have mostly considered representations of the world outside of Europe, but such an approach can enrich our understanding of any aspect of the *Commedia*'s worldview through a combination of historicizing references, contextualizing with contemporary cartographical sources and expanding our definition of what material is geographically relevant. The next step of such a project is to represent this important reconsideration of Dante's worldview through a cartographic medium. Since this approach deals so closely with representations of the world and considers medieval maps and images of

geography, it would be incomplete not to take advantage of current digital tools which allow us to visualize more accurately the stakes of Dante's geography in comparison to other geographical representations of his age.

Digitally Mapping Dante's Geography

While Dante's works are represented in a number of important digital humanities projects, current approaches to representing the geography of the poem leave much to be desired. Websites like *World of Dante* and the *Princeton Dante Project* include a number of modern maps to historically contextualize the world within which the poem was composed, including images of Hensman's *Dante Map* on *World of Dante*.²⁰⁷ However, these static images do not take advantage of the range of technologies available to humanities scholars and make it almost impossible for users to appreciate the full scope of the poem's earthly geography. Columbia's *Digital Dante* includes a number of videos illustrating the architecture behind Dante's construction of his *Inferno* and the video component is an improvement on static images available elsewhere. These videos reference the fifteenth century calculations of Antonio Manetti as well as Botticelli's elaborate illustration of hell from the same century. Brown University's Library hosts an online exhibition entitled "The Poetry of Science: Dante's *Comedy* and the Crafting of a Cosmos." This includes images from early editions of the *Commedia* which show how readers engaged with Dante's description of the physical geography of his worldview and the cosmological and cartographical stakes of the poet's choices. Some of these images are calculations of the specifics of Dante's afterlife, while others explore the ways in which fifteenth and sixteenth century readers understood how Dante's fictional world could possibly be

²⁰⁷ None of the maps included on any of these websites is from the medieval or early modern periods, but all of them are contemporary reconstructions of the regions and borders at Dante's time.

incorporated into their understanding of the world's geography, including the discovery of the New World. While these serve as important resources for understanding the geographical specifics of the poet's invention, as well as how readers have engaged with them, they still do not allow the user to interact with these ideas or make specific connections between the geography of the poem and the way it would have been understood at the time. Their availability online makes them more broadly accessible, but beyond that availability they do not offer more engagement with the materials under consideration than printed resources.

A different digital humanities project, entitled *Mapping Dante*, represents all of the places named in the poem on a standard GIS (geographical information systems) backdrop. Cities are depicted with pins while regions are indicated with slightly larger hazy circles. Clicking on a pin or circle reveals a box which gives greater detail on the reference (or references) to the place, including the citation, translation, speaker, and categorization. It is noted whether the reference is explicit, if it functions as a simile, if it has biblical or mythological significance, and other categorical information. While this project provides us access to the literal places named and might help us find where they are located in relation to each other, it does nothing to approximate the medieval experience of reading a map or conceptualizing physical space.

It is also important to note that such a modern depiction misses out on some of the references which we highlighted in chapter two as being particularly representative of the experience of using a medieval map. One of the examples of Dante as a user of *mappaemundi* is his indirect reference to Arabia in *Inferno* 24. He names three locations which are known for their terrible serpent populations, referring to Libya (*Inf.* 24. 85), Ethiopia (*Inf.* 24. 89) and “ciò che di sopra al Mar Rosso è” (that which is above the Red Sea, [*Inf.* 24. 90]). As established in

chapter two, this is clearly the view of Arabia on a *mappamundi* which was oriented with the East at the top, thereby making Arabia appear to be above the Red Sea rather than to the right of it as we are accustomed to seeing on modern maps. Libya and Ethiopia are named in the text and therefore appear on the digital map, but the reference to Arabia is so circuitous that it does not receive a pin point. Even were the digital map to include this reference to Arabia, a simple pin equivalent to those on Libya and Ethiopia would not represent the medieval specificity of this reference and its relationship to the *mappaemundi* tradition.

Another example of the poverty of simple digital representations of Dante's worldview can be connected to a different reference to "Arabs." In *Paradiso* 6, the poet is describing the Punic Wars and refers to the actions of the Carthaginians as "l'orgoglio de li Aràbi" (the pride of the Arabs [*Par.* 6. 49]). This reference serves to associate the medieval residents of Tunisia, the Arabs, with the ancient inhabitants of that place, the Carthaginians. Such a mixing of historical referents would not have been strange to users of *mappaemundi* who were accustomed to seeing biblical and classical figures depicted side by side on maps of the age. *Mapping Dante* accurately chooses to place the pin for this reference in the location of the city of Carthage. While this is the correct geographical location for the place, it misses the medieval mingling of temporal and spatial knowledge which is iconic of the *mappaemundi* tradition. Such an anachronism would appear strange on a map which evokes our GPS software aimed at helping us get from point A to point B. However, on a *mappamundi* the presence of ancient Carthaginians alongside "contemporary" Arabs in Tunisia would be just one of many such references and would not appear out of place.

Although *Mapping Dante* allows users to interact with a map of most of the places named in the poem in a way which is more accessible than Hensman's paper map and list of references, we have emphasized throughout this dissertation that names of places and the geographical relationships between them are only the first of many steps toward compiling a true geocritical understanding of the text. The future application of this research is the creation of a digital tool for engaging with Dante's ideas of space and geographical knowledge in a way which approximates more accurately medieval modes of engagement with these ideas. First of all, this would incorporate medieval *mappaemundi* and portolan charts as a dynamic backdrop, rather than a standard digital GIS format.²⁰⁸ As we have explored throughout this dissertation, understanding how medieval mapmakers represented their world is even more important for an appreciation of Dante's geography than knowing how many places in France he may have named over the course of his writings. So far, in existing Digital Humanities projects on the *Commedia* these two sources have been separated. *Mapping Dante* provides an overview of Dante's specific references while other websites include images of maps of Dante's historical world.

Along with combining a mapping of the actual places with medieval representations of geography there is a third important consideration which must be taken into account when considering how best to represent the geography of the *Commedia*. In considering how geography functions within the text of the poem, we must recognize that Dante's work is unlike almost any other in terms of its relationship to geography. Most literary works include their geographical references alongside the narrative. If the work names a place it is because the

²⁰⁸ The Hypercities Project hosted by UCLA is one example of a project which overlays numerous views of the same city or region from different time periods in order to offer a fuller understanding of how that place has been represented.

characters are there, will go, or have come from that place. The *Commedia* instead has an indirect and perhaps unparalleled relationship to the geographical references contained within it. As the pilgrim travels through *Inferno* almost none of the rich geographical descriptions of the real world have any connection to the action undertaken by the characters of the poem.²⁰⁹ In the realm of Purgatory the explicit connection to real-world geography is only to help us understand the time differences between the Southern Hemisphere where the poet is traveling and the Northern Hemisphere that he has left behind. In *Paradiso* the connections to real-world geography are even more tenuous as the pilgrim gets farther and farther from earthly concerns and approaches his encounter with the divine. This is in no way to argue that geography is not important within the poem, as the preceding four chapters have attempted to show just how much attention it deserves. However, such an indirect and circuitous relationship to geography could be said to be individual to the *Commedia*. For that reason the numerous approaches and methodologies developed by digital humanists who specialize in other texts and periods cannot be applied directly to the text we are considering. Our geographical references cannot be said to be central to the narrative unfolding of the poem, but rather importantly peripheral to it. The peripheral nature of these references is just as important to represent as the number of them. What a project like *Mapping Dante* fails to encapsulate is the particularity of the *Commedia*'s relationship to geographical knowledge.

²⁰⁹ The one exception to this may be the *Veglio di Creta* who is situated on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean and whose tears contribute to the rivers of Hell. Virgil describes him for the pilgrim:

<p>“Ciascuna parte, fuor che l’oro, è rotta d’una fessura che lagrime goccia, le quali, accolte, forán quella grotta. Lor corso in questa valle si diroccia; fanno Acheronte, Stige e Flegetonta;”</p>	<p>Each part of him, except the gold, is cracked; and down that fissure there are tears that drip; when gathered, they pierce through that cavern’s floor and, crossing rocks into this valley, form the Acheron and Styx and Phlegethon;</p>
--	---

Inf. 14.112-116

When we consider the approaches by other digital humanities mapping projects, we can see more specifically how the *Commedia* is different and why it requires specific solutions. The Furioso Atlas is one such project which maps the geography of Ludovico Ariosto's 1516 *Orlando Furioso*. In order to address some of the problems we have been discussing, the Furioso Atlas chose a representative contemporary map as background for the routes and stops of the characters (in this case the Waldseemüller map of 1507). This certainly provides an advantage over a standard digital display and the map's creator Daniel Leisawitz argues that "this map also helps to remind us that all maps, even purportedly scientific satellite-generated renderings, are always imperfect representations of the world, informed by conventions, the limitations of two-dimensional media, and our imaginations." The Waldseemüller map is notable for being the first map to identify the New World as "America," yet it still includes many references to mythical peoples and places reminiscent of earlier *mappaemundi*. While the Waldseemüller map may provide a relevant model for mapping Ariosto's *Furioso*, it is hard to identify one map contemporary to the *Commedia* which would serve as an indicative example of mapping technology at the time. Dante's poem is written during a period of extraordinary spatial and cartographical upheaval and for this reason I propose a more interactive model which would allow users to toggle between various maps, considering older forms of the *mappaemundi* as well as the most contemporary portolan charts available around the time the poet was writing.

Another difference to consider is that in the case of Ariosto's *Furioso* there is an explicit connection between the places named and the geography of the text. The Furioso Atlas is basically mapping the journeys taken by the characters. The Italian Romance Epic tradition is characterized by the wide ranging geographical wanderings of its characters and the text of the

Furioso practically demands to be mapped.²¹⁰ Conversely, we can see that there is a reason that the majority of Dante's readers have been fascinated with the structure and organizational logic of the afterlife he invented rather than his references to world geography. The poem positions the real-world geographical references as supporting material which is used to buttress the veracity of the fiction being created rather than as important references in their own right. Any representation of these references must also take into account the function they serve within the poem and to indiscriminately map every geographical reference alongside the others on one map obscures the diverse ways in which they interact with the fiction.

The geocritical model proposed by Westphal also gives us many of the tools that we need to break out of the narrative vise constructed by the poet which may distract us from considering his geographical references outside their fictional usage. Westphal's ultimate aim for geocriticism is to go beyond the geography of one text or one author and to create a plurality of perspectives. Travis defines his aims: "to situate real places and fictional spaces as postmodern lenses that focus on a wide range of cultural, theoretical, and aesthetic forms" (121). This project has already incorporated multiple cartographical sources, an appreciation of the historical context and an analysis of the critical tradition in order to better understand the stakes of Dante's use of geography both at his time and as his text became important geographical source material. Therefore, the digital representation of this research must also incorporate a variety of sources and references and cannot solely display places named in Dante's text.

For example, in creating a digital representation of the parameters of the world as defined by Dante throughout his poem, we may begin by indicating the locations of the references he

²¹⁰ I have written elsewhere on specific approaches to digitally mapping the Italian Romance Epic—see DeWitt (2018).

makes, but would situate these references alongside multiple other sources both literary and geographical. The inclusion of multiple images of *mappaemundi* would show the richness of the medieval tradition as well as the various ways in which Dante's worldview agrees or disagrees with other sources of his time. Such an approach would be excellent for demonstrating the variation in representations of the location of Jerusalem, and thereby illustrating the level of choice Dante had in choosing to make it the physical center of his world. It would also provide a stark illustration of the difference in Dante's representations of the East and the location of the Earthly Paradise. By incorporating not only images of medieval *mappaemundi* but also references from medieval geographical texts we could see the wide variety of strange and exotic places and peoples described, as well as their evident lack in Dante's poem.

In a sense this is the opposite of the distant reading approach suggested by Franco Moretti. Rather than taking the entirety of his references at face value and blindly projecting them onto a digital framework to look for emerging qualities, we are carefully curating a selection of historicized references which can illustrate figuratively a worldview which is evident within the text. Travis reminds us that "According to Deleuze and Guattari, both mapping and writing possess the power to anticipate and reimagine configurations of space, time, language, and culture, which have either been submerged by Cartesian space or yet to be perceived and represented" (19). We can argue that the worldview carefully constructed by the poet is reimagining configurations of space or at least making what was previously invisible visible. However, this visibility becomes less and less evident to future generations of readers who are farther removed from the society to which the poem refers. Such a digital map would aim to

represent the configurations which exist in the text but which become obscured through the narrative techniques of the poem.

One final significant consideration for any digital humanities project, is to incorporate a healthy wariness of the potential of such digital mapping technologies. While new tools are being developed and expanded specifically for the digital humanities, it is important to remember that the majority of digital mapping tools and geographical information systems were originally designed to serve the purposes of scientific research. Their rigid definitions of what constitutes a geographical location or region and how the relationships between those places can be represented are often at odds with the nuance and creativity of the humanistic endeavor. Travis argues that “we should interact with GIS but not necessarily in the way it has been conventionally designed and applied. Instead, we should explore the technology to ascertain what sort of toolkits it offers arts and humanities researchers.” Rather than allowing the conventions of the technology to dictate the ways in which we can visualize our research, we should use what helps us to illustrate important points and leave behind that which compromises the full representation of the stakes of our scholarship.

While chapter three did include a simple digital map of Ulysses’ journey as a representation of the physical locations mentioned in the poem, an ideal mapping of this journey would go far beyond simply charting the voyage and instead incorporate the full awareness of the navigational, cartographical and technological stakes of the journey described by Dante. This would incorporate medieval navigational charts and lists of ports, but would also need to represent the lived experience of that journey as described in contemporary sources and historical analysis of navigational technology. Such an idea is inspired by the model of *ORBIS*:

The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World. This digital project provides users with the opportunity to explore the historical reality of travel during the Roman Empire by taking into account not just the geography of the Roman world but also the conditions of travel at the time. The creators of the project argue for the necessity of their more dynamic approach by explaining: “Conventional maps that represent this world as it appears from space signally fail to capture the severe environmental constraints that governed the flows of people, goods and information.” As we have seen in our analysis of Ulysses’ voyage, it is not just the poem’s identification of him as transgressor of boundaries which leads to his shipwreck, but also the actual navigational danger of a voyage as bold and unprecedented as the one he undertakes.

This proposal to use digital approaches to represent the scholarship described above recognizes the importance of balancing traditional scholarly research with applying new and innovative technological approaches. Were the information contained herein only to be represented digitally we should not be able to achieve the level of detail and analysis necessary to the scholarly endeavor. However, by taking the next step and representing the findings of this research in a digital medium we can manifest their significance more effectively as well as make these findings available to a wider assortment of readers.

Appendix.

“Or dì a Fra Dolcin...”: An Excursus on Dolcino di Novara

In order to better understand the importance Dante ascribes to the figures of Maometto and Ali, and the role of Islam in the world, we must take into account more than just the question of their identification as schismatics, but also the entirety of the episode and how it fits within canto 28 of *Inferno*. When we look not just at Dante’s choice to include Maometto and Ali amongst the schismatics, but also how he chooses to depict the interaction between pilgrim and sinner, we come to understand much more about how Dante conceptualized these important figures. The dialogue which takes place between Dante pilgrim, his guide Virgil, and the schismatic Maometto is probably quite far from what readers would expect, yet as we will see it has deep social and geographical significance which we can uncover through a historicized reading of the references made throughout. After hearing that Dante is not a fellow sinner but still alive, Maometto’s initial response is to issue a warning to a Trecento Italian heretic who he suggests will soon join him in the bolgia:

Or dì a fra Dolcin dunque che s’armi,
tu che forse vedra’ il sole in breve,
s’ello non vuol qui tosto seguitarmi,

sì di vivanda, che stretta di neve
non rechi la vittoria al Noarese,
ch’altrimenti acquistar non saria leve

Then you, who will perhaps soon see the sun
tell Fra Dolcino to provide himself
with food, if he has no desire to join me

here quickly, lest when snow besieges him,
it bring the Novarese the victory
that otherwise they would not find too easy.

Inf. 28.55-60

As the conversation takes this unpredictable direction, we may ask ourselves why of all things the poet would choose this topic for the Prophet of Islam to address. An Italian heretic from the mountains surrounding Novara seems to have little to no connection to the Arab founder of Islam. However, when we look more closely at the tenets of Dolcino’s heresy as well as its effect on his society, we find far more parallels than might initially be supposed. In keeping with the

reading conducted in this chapter we will consider specifically the geographical component of the relationship between Maometto and Dolcino and how an understanding of it can deepen our view of Dante's ideas about the relationship between Christianity and the Islamic world.

One could argue that the association of the founder of Islam with a comparatively unimportant Italian heretic could serve to belittle the importance of Maometto and refocus the attention of the canto away from him. This is certainly possible, but as with any choice Dante makes in his poem, there is more than one layer of meaning to uncover in the significance of this prophecy. There are also a surprising number of parallels between contemporary descriptions of the heresy espoused by Dolcino and polemical Christian writings on the heretical teachings of Islam. In describing the ways in which medieval Christians used manipulated versions of the Prophet's biography as a weapon against Islam, Norman Daniel makes a crucial point:

we ought as well to notice that the fictional *persona* of Muhammad that Christians invented (together with some of his supposed teaching) corresponds remarkably to the character of prophets of the 'Free Spirit' who did actually arise in Europe, and claim credence and collect followers.
(273)

The Brethren of the Free Spirit were first identified as a movement in the 1270s by Albert the Great in his *Compilatio de novo spiritu*. They were originally found in Swabia, although variations of their ideas spread to France, Cologne, and Italy. The group was generally known for intense anticlerical sentiment, the denial of the necessity of the church and the belief that the individual could personally achieve a perfect union with God. The *apostolici* of Fra Dolcino were one group who shared many of these ideas and historians situate them within a larger movement of similar heresies spreading throughout Europe at the time. Lerner specifies that the Free Spirits "did not comprise a sect or homogenous organization" and that "there were always unaffiliated individuals who taught Free-Spirit doctrines but who had no direct contacts with one

another (229).” While Daniel makes the connection between Christian biographies of Muhammad and prophets of the Free Spirit specifically, this general observation can serve to include similar heretical groups like those of Fra Dolcino.

At the time of the *Commedia*, The Order of the Apostles or the *apostolici* had reached a high level of prominence and recognition in northern Italy and were under the leadership of Fra Dolcino. The order was founded in 1260 by a native of Parma named Gerardo Segarelli, after he was rejected from joining a Franciscan order. Despite not being accepted by the mainstream Franciscans, Segarelli still gave away all of his worldly possessions, put on coarse robes and preached the apostolic way of life around northern Italy. The group quickly gained popularity in the region and was not initially deemed heretical; in fact Segarelli sought church approval for his movement. The *apostolici* claimed to live following the model set forth by the Apostles and at a time when the Franciscan order was beginning to accrue wealth and influence, many members of the *apostolici* felt themselves to be the true followers of the *vita apostolica* as outlined in the Gospels.²¹¹ Over time the group developed a great mistrust of the Church establishment. Unsurprisingly, the church sought to discredit and quash this critical movement and the *apostolici* along with all unofficial mendicant orders were declared illegitimate at the 1274 Second Council of Lyon.²¹² Both Popes Honorius IV and Nicholas IV issued severe reprobations of the *apostolici* and Segarelli was ultimately burned at the stake in 1300.²¹³

²¹¹ See Pierce, 8.

²¹² Miccoli explains: “Il concilio di Lione (1274) si occupò indirettamente anche degli apostolici quando prescrisse la soppressione di tutte le ‘religioni’ e gli ordini mendicanti sorti dopo il IV concilio Lateranense.”

²¹³ In 1286 Honorius IV required the *apostolici* to enter into recognized orders and in 1290 Nicholas IV repeated this injunction. Segarelli was captured in 1294 and burned July 12, 1300 (see Miccoli).

Segarelli had never seen himself as the leader of the order and took no responsibility for the actions of his followers or the organization of their ranks. However, after his death Fra Dolcino took leadership over the group and used his new position to deliver prophecies and expand the influence and power of the Order. Pierce argues that a movement which had been generally harmless under Segarelli was turned into a significant threat to the church hierarchy through Dolcino's apocalyptic pronouncements and assertion of the superiority of the *apostolici* over any other mendicant order.²¹⁴ This prompted the crusade which was sent against him and his Order by the Pope. Gallenga reports that this was the only "crusade for the sake of the faith in Italy." The group was eventually defeated and captured. Dolcino and his lover Margerete, along with many other followers, were sentenced by the Inquisition and burned at the stake in 1307.

The *apostolici* seem to have been a particularly well-known group of heretics in Dante's contemporary Italy, but they were far from alone in their beliefs or the censure they received from the traditional church establishment. The thirteenth century saw a surge throughout Europe of mendicant religious orders which insisted on the poverty of their followers and urged them to preach these ideas to attract new members. A degree of orthodoxy was initially accorded to these movements when the church recognized the Franciscan and Dominican orders, but church support diminished when the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 banned the formation of any new mendicant orders.²¹⁵ Considering the popularity of these movements, this prohibition led to an excess of would-be devotees and the Franciscan monasteries did not have space for all those who wished to live a life of religious poverty and devotion. This led to the formation of new, albeit rogue, groups of mendicants throughout Europe who had varying degrees of disagreement with

²¹⁴ See Pierce, 118-124.

²¹⁵ See Lerner, 36.

standard Christian orthodoxy and often did not see themselves as constrained by the traditional hierarchy of the church. It is likely that much of the popularity of the *apostolici* stemmed from the fact that they provided a spiritual and social outlet for those segments of the population generally excluded from the religious sphere, particularly women and the uneducated.²¹⁶

This spiritual movement was also bolstered by a profound interest in the writings and prophecies of Gioacchino da Fiore, also known as Joachim of Flora (d. 1202).²¹⁷ Abbot Joachim spoke of three ages of the world which were each connected to a persona of the trinity.²¹⁸ The first age, of the father, was associated with the Hebrew prophets and the time of the Old Testament. The second age, of the son, was the age of the new testament and the church. However, Joachim prophesied that this second age was coming to an end. Joachimite scholar Gerardo di Borgo di San Donnino located this transition specifically in the year 1260, suggesting that this was the year which would mark the beginning of the final epoch of humanity, that of the holy spirit.²¹⁹ The culmination of the age of the holy spirit would mean that men would have direct communion with the divine and therefore would have no need for the church or the sacraments. Many of Joachim's followers saw various signs of the fulfillment of his prophecies in the events of the thirteenth century. The success of Saint Francis (d. 1226) in founding his

²¹⁶ See Orioli cited in Pierce (85).

²¹⁷ Dante placed Gioacchino da Fiore in the Heaven of the Sun as one of the mystics: "il calavrese abate Giovacchino/ di spirito profetico dotato" ("the Calabrian Abbot Joachim, who had the gift of the prophetic spirit." *Par.* 12.140-141) Gioacchino is the last named of the spirits in canto 12 of *Paradiso*, seated directly to the left of the spirit who is speaking to the pilgrim, Bonaventura da Siena. Commentators have noted that Gioacchino occupies a parallel position to Sigieri di Brabante who was the last named soul of *Paradiso* 10 and seated to the left of Thomas Aquinas. This positioning serves to recognize the controversy surrounding the ideas of both Siger and Gioacchino. In life Siger was attacked by Thomas Aquinas and Gioacchino's ideas were condemned by Bonaventura. The close positioning of two souls who disagreed in life serves to show that all conflicts are resolved in Paradise. This also serves to ultimately support the positions espoused by the two controversial figures.

²¹⁸ See Douie, 23-27 and Pierce, 110-117 for more on Joachim's prophecies and how they were received.

²¹⁹ Pierce suggests that the 1260 founding date of the *apostolici* is just a coincidence and does not reflect a concerted effort to symbolize the fulfillment of this prophecy (124).

order was seen as evidence for the superiority of the mendicant lifestyle. The struggles between Frederick II and the papacy were also seen as evidence that the age of the Church's power was coming to an end. Although some aspects of Joachim's ideas were banned by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, due to the influence they were having on the community of the faithful, Joachim himself was never condemned and although never canonized was referred to as *beatus* immediately following his death.

There were a number of different religious groups which followed the millenarian ideas espoused by Joachim. Such followers are generally referred to as Joachimites and they were condemned by the church along with the ideas which guided their philosophy. However, aspects of Joachimism can be seen in the ideas of a number of the rogue mendicant orders which informally sprung up during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries including the *apostolici*, the *fraticelli* and the Brethren of the Free Spirit.²²⁰ Scholars are in general agreement that Dolcino's claims for the order of the *apostolici* are based significantly on the prophecies of Joachim, although he makes some notable changes which benefit the aims of his particular project. While Joachim identified three ages of the world, Dolcino introduces a fourth. Dolcino's third period begins in the time of Pope Sylvester I (314-35) based on the fabled Donation of Constantine in which the Emperor Constantine was said to have given his wealth to the papacy, a move which would ultimately corrupt and delegitimize the church in Dolcino's worldview.²²¹ For Dolcino the

²²⁰ See Douie on the *fraticelli*, Lerner on the Free Spirit and Pierce on the *apostolici*.

²²¹ An event also bemoaned by Dante in *Inferno* 19.115-117:

<p>Ahi, Costantin, di quanto mal fu matre, non la tua conversion, ma quella dote che da te prese il primo ricco patre!</p>	<p>Ah, Constantine, what wickedness was born— and not from your conversion—from the dower that you bestowed upon the first rich father!"</p>
<p>and characterized negatively in the allegorical procession of <i>Purgatorio</i> 32.124-126:</p>	
<p>Poscia per indi ond' era pria venuta, l'aguglia vidi scender giù ne l'arca del carro e lasciar lei di sé pennuta</p>	<p>Then I could see the eagle plunge—again down through the tree—into the chariot and leave it feathered with its plumage</p>

clergy would soon come to an end, as he prophesied that the evil and corrupt prelates would be violently murdered in order to make way for the fourth age which would be heralded by the perfect apostolic poverty achieved by the order of the *apostolici*.

Unsurprisingly, these views made Dolcino very unpopular with the church establishment and a number of charges were leveled against him by chroniclers, inquisitors and biographers. In following Daniel's suggestion that it is the language of European heresy which is used to describe the threat of Islam, we can find a number of interesting parallels between reports about Dolcino and medieval stories about the Prophet Muhammad. Both figures are depicted as having dubious characters and accused of using false prophecies and deceitful language to attract their followers. There are many similarities between the deviant social practices which Dolcino and Maometto supposedly promoted and it is this social deviance which caused crusades to be sent against both their followers, albeit on different scales.

Pierce describes how the *apostolici* are almost always delegitimized by claims that Segarelli was uneducated and that Dolcino was the bastard son of a priest. He argues that this "effectively characterized the Order as a misguided popular movement that was not only simplistic but also illegitimate (12)." Pierce's research has shown that neither of these claims is necessarily accurate, but accuracy was never the intention of the defamatory sources. The Prophet Muhammad was historically illiterate and while not illegitimate he was an orphan from a very young age. While these facts have important significance in Islamic biographical sources and are seen in a positive light, Christian polemicists invariably portrayed them as negative characteristics of the founder of Islam and used them as evidence of his inferiority in comparison to Jesus Christ.

In regards to Dolcino's personal character, Benvenuto's commentary on Canto 28 includes an interesting story about his youth in which the young Dolcino steals money from his teacher, a priest named Augusto. This priest is depicted as having been duped by the young charge he had trusted. Dolcino is eventually found out and forced to confess and runs away to Trento where he founds his new sect. This story is also included in the glosses on these verses by the *Ottimo Commento* and *Chiose Vernon*. A similar depiction is often offered of the young Prophet Muhammad as Christian polemicists frequently explain the similarities between Christianity and Islam by reporting that Muhammad studied with Jewish and Christian teachers and learned the Old and the New Testaments. He then took his knowledge and expertise and used it to pervert and manipulate their teachings to create his new religion. In both of these stories we are presented with a young man who betrays the trust of his teachers and whose dishonesty leads to the foundation of a new sect which goes against the true and honest upbringing that they had received.

The methods they are said to have used in attracting followers are also quite similar. Dolcino was known for delivering prophecies. Reeves specifically explains: "He claimed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in interpreting the Scriptures and revealing the future (244)." In this canto Dante plays upon Dolcino's reputation for delivering prophecies by somewhat ironically having a prophecy delivered about the fate of Dolcino, a prophecy which will already have proved useless by the time the first readers of the *Commedia* encounter *Inferno* 28. However, it is also telling that many medieval commentators use similar language to describe the character of Maometto. Francesco da Buti insists that Maometto tricked the Arabs into believing the Holy

Spirit spoke to him by training a dove to eat out of his ear.²²² This trickery was generally used to describe how he convinced so many of his listeners to follow his false doctrines, a fact which Christian polemicists could not think to explain any other way. Dolcino is also described by the inquisitors as intoxicatingly charismatic, again to explain the success of his false teachings. In his commentary on these verses Benvenuto da Imola relates:

Fra Dolcino era intelligente e di grandissima eloquenza e la sua capacità oratoria, che suonava dolcissima, legava a tal punto gli ascoltatori che nessuno che gli si fosse accostato una volta avrebbe più potuto allontanarsene.

(Fra Dolcino was intelligent and of great eloquence and his oratory abilities, which sounded very sweet, captivated his listeners to the extent that no one who was caught one time could ever distance himself again).²²³

In the descriptions of both Dolcino and Maometto it is their deceitful charisma which is focused on by commentators and biographers. Both are described as citing the authority of the “holy spirit” for their prophecies, which while true in the case of Dolcino, is clearly a Christian fabrication in the description of the Prophet Muhammad’s biography. This is just one case in which we see how the language used to describe Christian heretics is transported fully into the polemic against Islam, regardless of the fact that many of the references don’t make sense in the foreign context.

It is not only the method with which they spread their teachings, but also the teachings themselves which are often attacked with similar tactics by inquisitors and polemicists. Along with the communion of goods generally preached by a growing mendicant movement in the late thirteenth century, Dolcino’s community was also accused of preaching a “community of

²²² Buti describes: “E così tra per forza e simulazione di santità, fingendo che li parlasse lo Spirito Santo in specie di colomba, la quale avea avvezza e costumata a beccare nell'orecchie sue per granella di biada, che sempre vi tenea, e faceala occultamente lasciare nel cospetto del popolo, venendo la colomba all'orecchie sue, e mettendoli il becco nell'orecchie, dicea al popolo che era lo Spirito Santo che li parlava.”

²²³ Italian translation of Benvenuto’s commentary on Dolcino included in Orioli (1987).

women.” Benvenuto relates that he taught his followers that they could have any kinds of relations with women as they pleased and only forbade them from being with their mothers and children.²²⁴ Bernard Gui, a Dominican friar commissioned as an inquisitor in 1307, wrote up practices of what he calls the “pseudo-apostles” based on his interrogations of them.²²⁵ He states that they believe “to lie with a woman and to engage in carnal intercourse with her is a greater deed than to bring the dead back to life” (407). The combination of the *apostolici*’s allowance for any manner of sexual relations outside of marriage, as well as their glorification of the sexual act, mirrors many of the imputations of perverseness leveled against Muslim societies. Norman Daniel explains that there was an overwhelming consensus among Christian polemicists that Islam allowed “quicunque actus venereus” (any sexual act) and the misconceptions surrounding the institution of concubinage led many Christian authors to exaggerate that Muslim men had hundreds of sexual partners, on top of their presumed four wives.²²⁶

Alongside the deviant sexual practices which both the *apostolici* and Muslims were supposed to be promoting, both groups were often derided for their loose views on marriage. Gui relates that Segaralli and Dolcino taught their followers that “a man without his wife’s consent, or a wife without her husband’s, may give up the matrimonial state to enter into their order (405).” Gui derisively adds “no prelate of the Roman church can sever the bonds of matrimony, but they have this power (405).” It certainly makes practical sense that in order to attract as many

²²⁴ Benvenuto specifies: “che si poteva usar delle donne a piacimento e ne derivava così che nessun connubio era peccato, fatta eccezione pei rapporti con le proprie madri o figli”.

²²⁵ English translation of Gui’s *Pratica inquisitionis heretice pravitatis* included in Wakefield and Evans.

²²⁶ Daniel clarifies: “Of Muslim practice there can have been practically no information available. Thus it was the number of wives allowed that was the focus of interest, rather than the number Muslims mostly had; it was generally implied, rather naively, that they would always enjoy in practice as many as they could by law (185).” For more on Christian representations of medieval sexual practices see Daniel, 158-185.

followers as possible to a life of mendicant celibacy they would need to find a way to accept formerly married initiates. However, it is striking that one of the strongest Christian critiques of Islamic law was the allowance for divorce. The fact that Muslim women were allowed to divorce was conflated to a type of polyandry. Despite the fact that Muslim women were not allowed to have two husbands at the same time, Christian thinkers could not conceptualize the fact that the woman's first husband could still be alive when she takes a second.²²⁷ They also objected to the ease with which a husband could divorce his wife, declaring that severing the marriage bond is "against the natural law and against reason."²²⁸ In both cases, the heretics in question are accused of desanctifying the institution of marriage for their own nefarious purposes.

Daniel posits: "It seems possible that there was some relation—how important a relation is not clear—between the unresolved social conflicts within Christendom and the inconclusive conflict with the external enemy" (273). What Daniel presents as a hypothesis, Dante makes manifest in his narrative and poetic choices in *Inferno* 28.²²⁹ Within the canto the poet does not make explicit his reason for having Maometto address a prophecy to Fra Dolcino of all people. However, through a close comparison of the various charges leveled by medieval Christian authors against Fra Dolcino, leader of the *apostolici*, and Muhammad, founder of Islam, we can see the significance of the similarities and overlaps. Although Dante introduces the founder of Islam as the primary representative of religious schism in his afterlife, he pays very little

²²⁷ Daniel reminds us: "All these misconceptions derived from imagining not marriage but Christian marriage" (161).

²²⁸ See Daniel, 170.

²²⁹ Dante also shows his awareness of the interrelation between religious conflict within Christianity and abroad through his parallel depictions of the crusading efforts of Saints Francis and Dominic. In exactly parallel verses of *Paradiso* 11 and 12 the poet describes Francis' efforts in Muslim lands and Dominic's exertions during the Albigensian crusade. See chapter one for more on the geographical implications of these depictions (specifically page 69, note 75).

attention to the theological specifics of Maometto's schism and an inordinate amount of time focused on a small conflict in the mountains of Piemonte.

It can serve as an insult to the significance of Islam to connect the major Abrahamic religion to a tiny Novarese heresy which had already been quashed by the time Dante's readers encountered *Inferno* 28. However, Fra Dolcino is just a representative of a much larger movement within medieval Christianity.²³⁰ Zane Mackin argues that "many Dante critics likewise conclude that Dante's punishment for Dolcino primarily (perhaps even exclusively) regards the political and social dimension of his action, rather than theological difference" (82). As we have seen in the previous chapter through a consideration of medieval Christian polemical sources on Islam, much of what informed Dante's condemnation of Maometto was also based on the political and social significance of Islam's dominance rather than a focused theological critique of an alternate belief system. This reinforces the parallels between Maometto's punishment and Dante's choice to have him address Fra Dolcino. Both figures were guilty primarily because their religious innovations led to warfare and sustained conflict among peoples who might otherwise have been neighbors and allies. While Dolcino's followers were not the only heretics to cast doubt upon the church and to preach doctrines against orthodoxy, the *apostolici* were the only movement which was strong enough, and violent enough, for the papacy to send a crusade against them in the mountains of Novara. Similarly, Muslims were reputed to spread their false doctrines through the sword and Christian leaders believed that crusades were necessary to protect the Christian populations in the holy land and to prevent further conversions away from the true faith.

²³⁰ Fosca points out that Dolcino is the only contemporary heretic named in the *Commedia*.

A historicized reading of the significance of the figure of Fra Dolcino can help us better understand Dante's choices in composing *Inferno* 28. The connections between medieval depictions of Dolcino and the Prophet Muhammad also shed light on what may have led Dante to pair the two as his representative schismatics. Ultimately, this reading of Dante's text can serve as important primary source material to further our understanding of Christian views of Islam and how they were intertwined with concerns about heresy closer to home. Daniel suggested that many descriptions of the Prophet Muhammad might have more connection to European heretics than the historical founder of Islam. However, very little overlap exists between polemical writings about Muslims and descriptions of European heretics. Combatting heresy at home was often undertaken by different people than those who were conducting mission work abroad. Dante's seemingly random pairing of Maometto and Ali with Novarese heretic Fra Dolcino is one of the few medieval sources which gives us a deeper insight into how medieval thinkers understood the varieties of heresy and schism with which they were faced. Contemporary scholars are often quick to establish firm boundaries between the East and the West and the worlds of Christianity and Islam. However, when we look more closely at the medieval sources we find evidence of boundaries which were much more porous and conceptions of the world which were much more complex than we often give them credit for.

Bibliography

Ahern, John. "What Did the First Copies of the Comedy Look Like?" *Dante For the New Millennium*, edited by Teodolinda Barolini and Wayne Storey, Fordham University Press, 2003, pp. 1–15.

Akbari, Suzanne Conklin. "Islam and Islamic Culture." *The Dante Encyclopedia*, edited by Richard H. Lansing, Garland Publishing, 2000.

Akbari, Suzanne Conklin, and Karla Mallette, editors. *A Sea of Languages: Rethinking the Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*. University of Toronto Press, 2013.

Alighieri, Dante. *La Commedia second l'antica vulgata*. Edited by Giorgio Petrocchi. 4 vols. Mondadori, 1967.

---. *Monarchia*. Translated by Prue Shaw, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

---. *Lecture given by Dante in Verona in 1320 on the Relation between the Water and the Land--His One Venture into "Scientific Writing."* Edited by Ermenegildo Pistelli, Translated by Phillip Wicksteed, Società Dantesca Italiana, 1960.

---. *Inferno*. Translated by Allen Mandelbaum. Bantam Books, 1982.

---. *The Divine Comedy*. Edited by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander. 3 vols. Anchor, 2008.

Ash, Eric. "Navigation Techniques and Practice in the Renaissance." *Cartography in the European Renaissance, Part 1*, vol. 3, University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 509–27.

Baldacci, Osvaldo. "Carte Nautiche." *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 1970, *Treccani*. http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/elenco-opere/Enciclopedia_Dantesca. Accessed 30 Sept 2019.

---. "Dante lettore di geocarte e portolani." *Rendiconti*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2001, pp. 173–79.

Barolini, Teodolinda. "Dante and Francesca Da Rimini: Realpolitik, Romance, Gender." *Speculum*, vol. 75, no. 1, 2000, pp. 1–28.

---. "Dante's Sympathy for the Other, or the Non-Stereotyping Imagination, Sexual and Racialized Others in the Commedia." *Critica Del Testo*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2011, pp. 177–204.

---. "Only Historicize: History, Material Culture (Food, Clothes, Books), and the Future of Dante Studies." *Dante Studies*, vol. 127, 2009, pp. 37–54.

---. "Q: Does Dante Hope for Vergil's Salvation? A: Why Do We Care? For the Very Reason We Should Not Ask the Question." *MLN*, vol. 105, no. 1, 1990, pp. 138–44.

---. *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*. Princeton University Press, 1992.

---. "Ulysses." *The Dante Encyclopedia*, edited by Richard H. Lansing, Garland, 2000, pp. 842–47.

Basserman, Alfred. *Dantes Spuren in Italien*. R. Oldenbourg, 1899.

---. *Orme di Dante in Italia*. Translated by Egidio Gorra, Zanichelli, 1902.

Baumgärtner, Ingrid. "Biblical, Mythical and Foreign Women in the Texts and Pictures of Medieval World Maps." *Hereford World Map: Medieval World Maps and Their Context*, edited by P.D.A. Harvey, The British Library, 2006, pp. 305–35.

Beazley, Raymond. *The Dawn of Modern Geography*. J. Murray, 1897.

Benigni, Elisabetta. "Dante and the Construction of a Mediterranean Literary Space: Revisiting a 20th Century Philological Debate in Southern Europe and in the Arab World." *Philological Encounters*, vol. 2, 2017, pp. 111–38.

Brugnoli, Giorgio. "Plinio il Vecchio." *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 1970, *Treccani*. http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/elenco-opere/Enciclopedia_Dantesca. Accessed 30 Sept 2019.

Burman, Thomas E. "How an Italian Friar Read His Arabic Qur'an." *Dante and Islam*, edited by Jan Ziolkowski, Fordham University Press, 2015, pp. 78–91.

---. *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom, 1140–1560*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

Busch, Silvia Orvietani. "Luni in the Middle Ages: The Agony and the Disappearance of a City." *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 17, no. 4, Jan. 1991, pp. 283–96.

Cachey, Jr., Theodore J. "Cartographic Dante." *Italica*, vol. 87, no. 3, Autumn 2010, pp. 325–54.

---. "Cartographic Dante: A Note on Dante and the Greek Mediterranean." *Dante and the Greeks*, edited by Jan Ziolkowski, Dunbarton Oaks, 2014, pp. 197–226.

---. "Cosmology, Geography and Cartography." *Dante in Context*, edited by Zygmunt Baranski and Lino Pertile, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 221–40.

---. "Dante's Journey Between Fiction and Truth: Geryon Revisited." *Dante da Firenze all'aldilà: atti del terzo seminario dantesco internazionale*, edited by Michelangelo Picone, F. Cesati, 2001, pp. 75–92.

---. *Le isole fortunate: appunti di storia letteraria Italiana*. L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1995.

Campbell, Tony. "Portolan Charts from the Late Thirteenth Century to 1500." *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, vol. 1, University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp. 370–463.

Cecilia, Adolfo. "Gade." *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 1970, *Treccani*. http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/elenco-opere/Enciclopedia_Dantesca. Accessed 30 Sept 2019.

---. "Gerusalemme." *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 1970, *Treccani*. http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/elenco-opere/Enciclopedia_Dantesca. Accessed 30 Sept 2019.

---. "Gibilterra." *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 1970, *Treccani*. http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/elenco-opere/Enciclopedia_Dantesca. Accessed 30 Sept 2019.

Cerulli, Enrico. *Il "libro della scala" e la questione delle fonti Arabo-Spagnole della Divina Commedia*. Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1949.

Chiodo, Carol. *Dante's Poetry between Technology and Transcendence*. Yale University, 2014.

Cioffari, Vincenzo. *Anonymous Latin Commentary on Dante's Commedia: Reconstructed Text*. Centro Italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1989.

Coggeshall, Elizabeth. "Dante, Islam, and Edward Said." *Telos*, vol. 139, 2007, pp. 133–51.

Cohen, Jeremy. *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity*. University of California Press, 1999.

Cornish, Alison. *Reading Dante's Stars*. Yale University Press, 2000.

---. *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy: Illiterate Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Corti, Maria. "Dante and Islamic Culture." *Dante and Islam*, Fordham University Press, 2014, pp. 45-64.

---. "Le metafore della navigazione, del volo e della lingua di fuoco nell'episodio di Ulisse ('Inferno' XXVI)." *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Aurelio Roncaglia: a cinquant'anni dalla sua laurea*, vol. 2, Mucchi, 1989, pp. 479–91.

da Barberino, Francesco. *I documenti d'amore di Francesco Da Barberino secondo i mss. originali*. Edited by Francesco Egidi, La Società, 1905.

da Pisa, Giordano. *Prediche inedite del B. Giordano Da Rivalto Dell'ordine de' Predicatori: recitate in Firenze dal 1302 al 1305*. G. Romagnoli, 1867.

D'Ancona, Alessandro. "La Leggenda Di Maometto in Occidente." *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, vol. 13, 1889, pp. 199–281.

Daniel, Norman. *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*. Rev. ed, Oneworld, 1960.

de la Cruz Palma, Óscar, and Cándida Ferrero Hernandez. "Chronica Mendosa et Ridicula Sarracenorum." *Christian-Muslim Relations 600-1500*, 2010, Brill. <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/christian-muslim-relations-i>. Accessed 30 Sept 2019.

Demaray, John G. *Dante and the Book of the Cosmos*. American Philosophical Society, 1987.

---. *The Invention of Dante's Commedia*. Yale University Press, 1974.

DeWitt, Allison. "Digital Approaches to the Italian Romance Epic in the Classroom." *Teaching the Italian Renaissance Romance Epic*, edited by Jo Ann Cavallo, Modern Language Association of America, 2018, pp. 175-182.

Di Cesare, Michelina. *The Pseudo-Historical Image of the Prophet Muhammad in Medieval Latin Literature: A Repertory*. De Gruyter, 2012.

Douie, Decima. *The Nature and the Effect of the Heresy of the Fraticelli*. Manchester University Press, 1932.

Edson, Evelyn. *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed Their World*. British Library, 1997.

---. "Reviving the Crusade: Sanudo's Schemes and Vesconte's Maps." *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travellers, 1050-1550*, edited by Rosamund Allen, Manchester University Press, 2004, pp. 131-155.

Einboden, Jeffrey. "Voicing an Islamic Dante: The Problem of Translating the Commedia into Arabic." *Neophilologus*, vol. 92, no. 1, Nov. 2007, pp. 77-91.

Ferrante, Joan M. *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*. Princeton University Press, 1984.

Forget, Jacques. "Schism." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 13, Robert Appleton Company, 1912.

Friedman, John Block. *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*. Harvard University Press, 1981.

Gabrieli, Francesco. "Maometto." *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 1970, Treccani. http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/elenco-opere/Enciclopedia_Dantesca. Accessed 30 Sept 2019.

Gabrieli, Giuseppe. *Dante e l'Oriente*. Zanichelli, 1921.

Gallenga, Antonio. *A Historical Memoir of Fra Dolcino and His Times: Being an Account of a General Struggle for Ecclesiastical Reform and of an Anti-Heretical Crusade in Italy, in the Early Part of the Fourteenth Century*. London, 1853.

Gambinossi Conte, Teresa. *I Luoghi d'Italia Rammentati Nella Divina Commedia: Raccolti e Spiegati Alla Gioventù Italiana*. R. Bemporad e figlio, 1893.

Gázquez, José Martínez. "Translations of the Qur'an and Other Islamic Texts before Dante (Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries)." *Dante and Islam*, edited by Jan Ziolkowski, translated by Andrew Gray, Fordham University Press, 2015, pp. 67–77.

Giansoldati, Franca. "Bologna, sale la preoccupazione per l'affresco di Maometto all'inferno a San Petronio." *Il messaggero*, Gennaio 2015.

Ginsberg, Warren. "Hell's Borderlands: A Preliminary Cartography." *MLN*, vol. 127, no. 1, Jan. 2012, pp. 146–54.

Gow, Andrew. "Fra Mauro's World View: Authority and Empirical Evidence on a Venetian Mappamundi." *Hereford World Map: Medieval World Maps and Their Context*, edited by P.D.A. Harvey, The British Library, 2006, pp. 405–414

Harley, J. B. "Deconstructing the Map." *Cartographica*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 1–20.

Harvey, P. D. A. "Medieval Maps: An Introduction." *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, vol. 1, University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp. 283–85.

Hawkins, Peter S. *Dante's Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination*. Stanford University Press, 1999.

---. "Jerusalem." *The Dante Encyclopedia*, edited by Richard H. Lansing, Garland, 2000, pp. 536–37.

Hensman, Mary. *Dante Map*. David Nutt, 1892.

Horden, Peregrine, and Sharon Kinoshita, editors. *A Companion to Mediterranean History*. Wiley Blackwell, 2014.

Inglese, Giorgio. *Vita di Dante: una biografia possibile*. Carocci Editore, 2015.

Kamal, Youssef. *Monumenta Cartographica Africae et Aegypti*. 1926.

Kominko, Maja. "New Perspectives on Paradise—The Levels of Reality in Byzantine and Latin Medieval Maps." *Cartography in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Fresh Perspectives, New Methods*, vol. 10, Brill, 2008, pp. 139–54.

Lerner, Robert E. *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*. Corr. & Reprint. with permission, Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1972.

Levi Pisetzky, Rosita. *Storia del costume in Italia*. Vol. 1 & 2, Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1964.

Lewis, Archibald R. "Northern European Sea Power and the Straits of Gibraltar, 1031-1350 AD." *Order and Innovation in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Joseph R. Strayer*, Princeton University Press, 1975, pp. 139-164.

Mackin, Zane. *Dante Praedicator: Sermons and Preaching Culture in the Commedia*. Columbia University, 2013.

Mallette, Karla. *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean: Toward a New Philology and a Counter-Orientalism*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

Menocal, Maria Rosa. *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.

Moore, Edward. "The Geography of Dante." *Studies in Dante: Third Series*, Clarendon Press, 1903, pp. 109-43.

Moretti, Franco. *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*. Verso, 2007.

Morosini, Roberta. "'Sapientia Vincit Malitiam.' Informing and Deforming Knowledge. Dante's Inferno XXVIII." *Vitae Mahometi: Reescritura e Invención En La Literatura Cristiana de Controversia*, edited by Óscar de la Cruz Palma, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2014.

Morse, Victoria. "The Role of Maps in Later Medieval Society: Twelfth to Fourteenth Century." *Cartography in the European Renaissance, Part 1*, vol. 3, University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 25-54.

Muñoz, Fernando González. "Liber Nycholay, Qui Dicitur Machumetus, Quomodo Christianam Legem Subuertit et Credulitatem Sarracenorum Fecit." *Christian-Muslim Relations 600-1500*, 2010, Brill. <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/christian-muslim-relations-i>. Accessed 30 Sept. 2019.

Murray, Alexander. "Purgatory and the Spatial Imagination." *Dante and the Church: Literary and Historical Essays*, edited by Paolo Acquaviva and Jennifer Petrie, Four Courts Press for the UCD Foundation for Italian Studies, 2007, pp. 61-92.

Negrón, Luis M. Girón. "Islamic and Jewish Influences." *Dante in Context*, edited by Zygmunt Baranski and Lino Pertile, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 200-220.

Olson, Kristina M. "Uncovering the Historical Body of Florence: Dante, Forese Donati, and Sumptuary Legislation." *Italian Culture*, vol. 33, no. 1, Mar. 2015, pp. 1-15.

Orioli, Raniero. *Fra Dolcino: nascita, vita e morte di un'eresia medievale*. Europia, 1984.

Orosius, Paulus. *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans: The Apology of Paulus Orosius*. Translated by Irving Woodworth Raymond, Columbia University Press, 1936.

- Orr, Mary Ackworth. *Dante and the Early Astronomers*. Gall and Inglis, 1913.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Edited by R.J. Tarrant, Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Palacios, Miguel Asín. *Islam and the Divine Comedy*. Translated by Harold Sunderland, J. Murray, 1926.
- . *La Escatología Musulmana En La Divina Comedia: Seguida de La Historia y Crítica de Una Polémica*. Editorial Maestre, 1919.
- Petrarca, Francesco. *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*. L.S. Olschki, 2008.
- Piatti, Barbara, and Lorenz Hurni. "Cartographies of Fictional Worlds." *The Cartographic Journal*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2011, pp. 218–23.
- Pierce, Jerry B. *Poverty, Heresy, and the Apocalypse: The Order of Apostles and Social Change in Medieval Italy 1260-1307*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- Pryor, John H. *Commerce, Shipping, and Naval Warfare in the Medieval Mediterranean*. Variorum Reprints, 1987.
- Puchades i Bataller, Ramon J. *Les Cartes Portolanes: La Representació Medieval d'una Mar Solcada*. 1. ed, Lunweg, 2007.
- Reeves, Marjorie. *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Revelli, Paolo. *L'Italia nella Divina Commedia*. Fratelli Treves, 1922.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1st ed, Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Salvini cita Dante: "Immigrati estremisti tornate a casa vostra." Agenzia VISTA, 12 Nov. 2016.
- Sanudo, Marino. *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross*. Translated by Peter Lock, Ashgate, 2011.
- Safi, Alessandro. *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth*. University of Chicago, 2006.
- Schildgen, Brenda Deen. *Dante and the Orient*. University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- Schulz, Juergen. "Jacopo de' Barbari's View of Venice: Map Making, City Views and Moralized Geography before the Year 1500." *Art Bulletin*, vol. 60, 1978, pp. 425–74.

Sheehan, Kevin E. *The Functions of Portolan Maps: An Evaluation of the Utility of Manuscript Nautical Cartography from the Thirteenth through Sixteenth Centuries*. Durham University, 2014.

Siena, Lodovico. *Storia Della Città Di Sinigaglia*. S. Calvani, 1746.

Squires, Nick. "Dante's Divine Comedy 'Offensive and Should Be Banned.'" *The Telegraph*, 13 Mar. 2012.

Stanford, William Bedell. *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero*. Spring Publications, 1992.

Tally, Robert T. *Spatiality*. Routledge, 2013.

---. "Spatiality's Mirrors: Reflections on Literary Cartography." *English Language and Literature*, vol. 61, no. 4, 2015, pp. 557–76.

Tommasino, Pier Mattia. "Visio e divisio in Inferno XXVIII: qualche riflesssione sulle fonti islamiche della Commedia." *Dante e la dimensione visionaria tra medioevo e prima età moderna*, edited by Bernhard Huss and Mirko Tavoni, Longo Editore, 2019, pp. 61-79.

Travis, Charles. *Abstract Machine: Humanities GIS*. 2015.

Turnbull, David. "Cartography and Science in Early Modern Europe: Mapping the Construction of Knowledge Spaces." *Imago Mundi*, vol. 48, 1996, pp. 5-24.

Ventura, Paolo. "La Divina Commedia." *Christian-Muslim Relations 600-1500*, 2010, Brill. <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/christian-muslim-relations-i>. Accessed 30 Sept. 2019.

von den Brincken, Anna-Dorothee. "Jerusalem on Medieval Mappaemundi: A Site Both Historical and Eschatological." *Hereford World Map: Medieval World Maps and Their Context*, edited by P.D.A. Harvey, The British Library, 2006, pp. 355-375.

---. "Roma nella cartografia medievale (secoli XI-XIII)." *Roma antica nel medioevo: mito, rappresentazioni, sopravvivenze nella "Respublica Christiania" dei secoli IX-XIII*, Vita e Pensiero, 2001, pp. 209–29.

Wakefield, Walter, and Austin Evans. *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*. Columbia University Press, 1969.

Westphal, Bertrand. *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*. Translated by Robert T. Tally, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Westrem, Scott D. *The Hereford Map: A Transcription and Translation of the Legends with Commentary*. Brepols, 2001.

Woodward, David. "Medieval Mappaemundi." *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, vol. 1, University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp. 286–370.

Yolles, Julian, and Jessica Weiss, editors. *Medieval Latin Lives of Muhammad*. Harvard University Press, 2018.

Ziolkowski, Jan. "Introduction." *Dante and Islam*, edited by Jan Ziolkowski, Fordham University Press, 2015, pp. 1-28.